

Epilogue

The World the Wave Made, or The Sincerity of Capital

The international journalists and observers who are interested in our young musical scene very rarely escape from their Western-centric reflexes.

(ZINE 2006: 23)

We believe that all cultures are equal in a world that is not, and that all artists should be able to tell their stories by themselves.

(NAAR 2018: [HTTP://NAAR.FR/ABOUT/](http://naar.fr/about/))

We're like the Bronx in the 1970s. We need ten years to get hip hop as a confirmed culture.

(DON BIGG, PERSONAL COMMUNICATION [P.C.], CASABLANCA, OCTOBER 21, 2009)

In September 2017, I watched a musical and cultural transition take place backstage at the Boulevard Festival in Casablanca. The first night of the festival included a diverse slate of hip hop artists, beginning with the first- and second-prize winners of the Tremplin. The women of Jokko Fam shared an artist's tent next to Proof G Killah, a second-generation emcee and former Tremplin laureate who had brought along 7liwa (pronounced *hliwa*) and L'Ferda, two young trap musicians generating lots of social media chatter. Masta Flow, one of the emcees from first-generation group Casa Crew, was billed as a solo artist, though he was supported onstage by other members of his group and a live band. And following their tradition of bringing internationally recognized headliners to the festival, Boulevard closed the night with the New York duo M.O.P.

As people circulated through the tents, chatting and doing interviews with local media, I noticed divisions emerging by musical style, age, and markers of class status. While Masta Flow hosted a stream of musicians through his tent, the youngest

performers politely avoided his bandmates J-Ok and Caprice, sharing deferential nods and hellos before moving on to their own conversations.

As I watched, I considered reasons this might be so. Caprice and J-Ok had released little music since Casa Crew stopped recording together in the early 2010s. As a beatmaker and producer, Masta Flow continued to record new music for himself and others. The younger performers were recognized, by the media, the audiences, and the musicians themselves, as the leading edge present at the festival. In addition, I could not help but notice that the performers receiving intense attention on social media were attired in fashionable clothes, caps, and sneakers, with the most recent bags and cell phones. Caprice, by contrast, wore a plain white polo and a camouflage-printed baseball cap with the pirated logo of a luxury designer.

Once we sat down to catch up, I realized there might be additional reasons Caprice was not at the center of the evening's socializing. Shouting over the sound of that year's Tremplin winners, who were sharing an extended call-and-response with the audience a few yards away, I asked him how things had changed in hip hop since our last interview in 2010. "It's been like a big change all these couple years," he began.¹ "It's like the same thing that happened in the United States. It's like, rap told stories. Now it's like too much loud, now it's like trap music or that kind, you know what I mean? So . . . that thing is not like real hip hop, not like the first rappers . . . it doesn't have anything in the lyrics. The people, they just wanna get high and listen."

I next asked, "Do you think that the young audience is different than the audience in the 2000s?"

C: Yeah. This is something, like, that you see . . . They don't say "look at them, they are the originators of hip hop, we're gonna respect that guy." Muslim is doing this all for hip hop, Aminoffice.² . . . Like J. Cole is saying in his song, I listened to it, he's saying Nas—they say "Tupac is Jesus, and Nas wrote the Bible."³ So he means, like, there's something bigger. It has nothing to do with religion but I understand his philosophy. . . . You gotta respect older rappers, because they're the ones that started things. You don't have to say "yeah, yeah, that's old rap."

KS: . . . It sounds like you're saying that today's hip hop fans don't know Moroccan hip hop history.

C: Some of them—a lot of them—know about the history of hip hop. But just he doesn't wanna say the truth. Know what I mean? Because the truth [is], somebody, he's, you know, he's like [points to himself].

Caprice's comments fit a discourse I heard with increased frequency in 2017. According to this narrative—shared by some younger artists—young audiences lacked interest in the traditional qualities that Caprice found so important. By comparing trap to "real hip hop" and suggesting both emcees and listeners were uninterested in thoughtful lyrics, Caprice was making an argument about what "real hip hop" did or should do and complaining that others were abandoning what made the art form great. In this discourse, the move to a new style of hip

hop also had implications for community ethics, as both artists and audiences either didn't know or didn't care to respect their elders' contributions. Instead, as he intimidated by gesture, they preferred to represent themselves as new, unique, or self-made.

Before I left the artists' tents that evening, I asked Masta Flow some of the same questions I had asked Caprice.

KS: For you, what has changed in Moroccan hip hop [since 2010]?⁴

MF: Just as [it has in] the whole world, especially like the US. There's classic rap, after that . . . [styles like] bounce, now we got trap music . . . this is the way it is. But I got no problem with this. You understand? I've got to accept it. Because music changes. First there was rap . . . now trap music, in the future, there will be something else. . . . Things change, *kaydour kaydour*.⁵

KS: It sounds like you've had this conversation before.

MF: Yeah yeah yeah. Just now on the TV, they asked me and I gave them the same answer. Everyone—like, the people who came up with us, we don't like this new generation. [But] you don't say that, you know? Every generation has its own lifestyle and their own things, you know? Us, our lifestyle was the real life . . . in the street, with the people. . . . Them, the new generation, it's more about digital. The digital and, after this, the real life. But us, it was the real life first, then the digital.

KS: Not all of the first generation have made a transition to digital. . . . But you have.

MF: This is not a choice, you know. It's an obligation. . . . This is the new way of communication with the people. I don't use digital [as well as] the new generation does. I just use it to *be* digital, because if I'm not in the digital, someone else will take my personality . . . and my place.

Masta Flow and Caprice reacted differently to the same trends in transnational hip hop culture. Where Caprice felt something valuable receding into the past, Masta Flow stressed his "obligation," using the English term, to follow the culture into new platforms if not new musical styles.⁶ Both understood responsibility to one's audiences to be at the center of one's practice, but they attached different expectations to that understanding. For Caprice, some audiences were no longer doing their part to seek out, absorb, and be sensitized to the lessons emcees delivered through both music and text. When I asked him if audiences were different now than in the early 2000s, his complaints sounded like the familiar concerns of elders from many genres: "Now they just listen to the rhythm. They don't care about the lyrics, about the flow." By contrast, Masta Flow characterized the era as part of a natural cycle. Younger audiences were simply finding their own voice, and in order to connect with "the people"—an artistic and economic necessity—he would have to listen and change as well.

Near the end of our conversation, Caprice explained that he hoped the lyricism and critique he loved would continue to find dedicated listeners. "The public must

have knowledge,” he said, echoing concerns he and his generation had expressed for over two decades. I had expected elder musicians to critique the new generation’s preferences. But beliefs about class positioning, self-fashioning, epistemologies of listening, and music’s role as a driver of change were just as divisive as differences in musical style.

In September 2017, “trap” could refer to multiple things. For some, it was a particular style with a distinct history; for others, the term seemed to stand in for any new developments in hip hop. But at the time, one song came up repeatedly: 7liwa’s “Haribo.” Released in 2015 on his mixtape *Wald Fatima* (Fatima’s Son), it circulated much further after the launch of its video in January 2017. 7liwa was among the first Moroccan artists to use trap’s signature vocal sounds, styles of delivery, and drum sounds and patterns. For the first-generation musicians with whom I mostly conversed, the musical and sonic aspects were less important than the song’s gleeful references to illicit drugs, made explicit in the video, and its insistent lyrical repetition, enhanced by sections of triplet-based flow in the verses. But for those listening carefully, 7liwa was speaking to issues that were vital to any of Moroccan hip hop’s most “conscious” artists, including inequality, emigration, and the distance between the nation-state’s self-portrayal on the international stage and citizens’ experiences of the state at home.

That evening, at the Boulevard Festival, 7liwa was the most controversial exponent of trap on the stage. The festival itself took an active role in the debate around trap; in its press release following the event, it described 7liwa and his fellow emcee L’Ferda as “the new idols of the youth, straight from the internet . . . whose success is counted in clicks” (EAC-L’Boulvart 2017: 2). It also highlighted Masta Flow discussing the new generation, just as he had told me: “We were sniped at by classical musicians back in the day, we won’t make the same mistakes” (EAC-L’Boulvart 2017: 2).

For my interlocutors, the questions I asked connected to a conversation already roiling about the practices and mentalities trap encouraged among listeners and, in turn, the future of hip hop. As some of the relatively few first-generation artists who had continued to make music into the late 2010s, Masta Flow, Caprice, and others were understandably concerned about the material and social infrastructure they had left for future musicians. In our conversation at Sbagha Bagha, MC Dalim compared the situation to that which he had studied for his degree. Just as the Harlem Renaissance had paved the way for midcentury intellectuals and activists, he said, first-generation hip hop practitioners should have “laid the road (dar al-triq)” for the next generation—and some, like him, were still trying to do so (Casablanca, July 1, 2018).

This epilogue starts from these discourses to consider how, in the years after the February 20 reform movement of 2011 and 2012 and subsequent changes in the state’s support for popular musicians, Moroccan hip hop’s oldest performing musicians view the musical world they made. How does the emergence of the “new generation” reveal the “old school’s” values?

In the preceding chapters, practitioners insist on their responsibility to educate a national public and on possibilities for change through, not despite, the ways

they are naturalized as neoliberal citizens. Trap music and discourses, by contrast, are often considered by both Moroccan artists and music scholars to be post the failed political, economic, and moral nexus of neoliberalization (Burton 2017). Yet the seemingly apolitical stance of some trap musicians is also a political choice, and throughout this epilogue, I suggest that trap's silences on some issues and volume on others show how little the larger political-economic conjuncture has changed since the 1990s. Moreover, while several Moroccan hip hop artists are now signed to major labels or subsidiaries based in Europe or the United States, the discourses within which artists find success continually expect them to reperform their difference.

Throughout this book, I have asked: How are those not currently understood as "subjects of value" (Skeggs 2004, 2014)—that is, those who are valued and work with value, rather than those who are objectified by valuation and evaluation—trying to make themselves into subjects of value? One way is by adopting tools of neoliberal self-making, including discourses and practices of entrepreneurship, resilience, and speculation, a package we might call self-financialization. I have sought to balance discussion of these tools with the fervent commitments practitioners hold in order to show how my interlocutors intertwine the two in everyday life. As recent reconsiderations of neoliberalization have pointed out, reframing studies of neoliberal contexts as "track[ing] a logic of exclusion from the economy rather than total subsumption in it" better foregrounds that "many of the subjects of the present know full well the conditions of the world in which they live" (McClanahan 2019: 123–24). Starting from recognition of their own intersecting forms of exclusion, my interlocutors and the musicians who followed them assert their own unquantifiable value as people by tracking, discussing, and creating economic value for themselves and others. As we have seen, practitioners are well aware that critiques of national and global political-economic systems, when rendered by the global north's postcolonial others, generate multiple kinds of value in markets for racialized music and representations (Hilgers 2013: 75; Rollefson 2017). Informed in part by the transnational hip hop tradition's forms of argument and analysis, practitioners use music, discourse, and action to perform responses to neoliberalization that simultaneously adopt many of its premises and insist on their value within an exclusionary system.

DIR AL-TRIQ

In 2014, Soultana created a nonprofit association named Youth Vision. Inspired by meeting the leaders of Chicago's Kuumba Lynx, she wanted to create similar hip hop-based educational projects for young people. In 2015, I accompanied Soultana as she and Youth Vision worked to create a benefit concert featuring first-, second-, and third-generation hip hop musicians in Meknes. The proceeds from ticket sales and donations would go to school supplies for underprivileged children in the rural areas outside the city. After securing and then losing

commitments from performers, struggling to find a venue that would allow a hip hop concert, and finding themselves unable to cover costs through donations or their own money, they eventually gave up on their plan. The association wanted to fill a small but meaningful hole in the safety net, but it found insurmountable roadblocks at individual and institutional levels.

A few years later, Soultana and I were discussing the “new generation” and their attitudes toward older hip hop artists. “It’s partly the old generation’s fault,” said Soultana, that the youngest artists lacked understanding of “the real meaning of hip hop” and of their country’s history in the genre. In the late 2000s, when some leaders were receiving relatively large sums from competitions and to perform at national festivals, artists “didn’t invest in hip hop,” she argued.

I reminded Soultana of Youth Vision and the Meknes benefit concert project. “But what if we had started . . . in 2010 instead of 2014,” she responded.

“If you had started in 2010, you might have been shut down in 2011,” I suggested.

“2011! Yeah, that’s right. As soon as *al-‘Adl wa al-Tammia* came in!” (p.c., January 2018).⁷

Soultana’s memory of her own actions, and her reactions to other initiatives, centered on work ethic, intention, and imagination rather than on the surrounding context. She held herself and her colleagues responsible for shaping the aesthetic and social commitments of the new generation, without considering the external factors—from the opaque Meknes bureaucracy to changes in national leadership—that stymied her and others’ projects. Like many of the pioneering musicians throughout this book, Soultana embodied aspects of the responsabilization that hip hop artists promoted in the 2000s. Dedicated to articulating and denouncing problems, but also to the possibility of progress, Soultana’s meritocratic ideology was both deeply individualized and committed to reproducing generational and familial obligations. Only when frustrated—or when analyzing them in her lyrics—did she consider the systems of governance in which she was embedded.

Like other first- and second-generation musicians with whom I worked, Soultana was convinced the first generation had failed to “lay the road (*dir al-triq*)” for the next hip hop artists. I often heard this from people actively engaged in laying the road, such as the mentors at Sbagha Bagha (see chapter 4), as well as younger artists who found themselves diagnosing the same issues as their elders had done.

Trap artists explain with acute analysis and poignant repetition the challenges they face as artists and cultural producers. Shayfeen, a duo from the small Atlantic coast town of Safi, first gained wide appreciation among hip hop listeners in Morocco with their mixtape *L’Energie* (2012). In 2015, they won the grand prize in the national Generation Mawazine competition. In 2018, they joined NAAR, a nascent cultural collective based in Paris. In preparation for their first Paris concert, they gave interviews that recapitulated the aesthetic, economic, and political motivations I had heard from first-generation interlocutors since 2008.

Like their predecessors, who heard the Arabic and Moroccan pop that dominated the airwaves in the 1990s as musically and socially empty, Shayfeen experienced a profound impulse to move away from conventions they found stifling. “We really wanted to leave behind this very lyrical rap, we had already proven ourselves [able to do it] before. . . . When we began with trap, we found more pleasure and more artistic freedom” (Simonian 2018). Maha Rhannam notes that Shayfeen “argue that conscious rap is only to be associated with the old-school generations and stated their preferences for rap showcasing the flow and beat features of the rappers” (2019: 59).

Shayfeen also compared their country’s media economy and ecosystem to Europe’s in exactly the same terms as my first-generation interlocutors. “We have nothing,” Shobee, one half of the duo, told the French magazine *Konbini* in a video interview. “No [music] industry, no subventions, nothing at all. But at the same time, we make it happen” (Konbini 2018).

Their success at Morocco’s largest and best-funded festival was also framed as evidence of the paucity of opportunity they and others faced. “At one moment, we participated in the Mawazine festival in Salé, but the headliners’ stage, it’s for foreign stars. If you want more, you must move [out of the country],” Shobee explained to *Jeune Afrique*. In their view, Moroccan institutional support “goes first to that which is classified as world music” (Crétois 2018).

These complaints echo concerns listed to me by everyday aspiring musicians and cultural elites in the late 2000s. Compare Shobee’s list, for example, with the things L-Tzack explained that Morocco’s popular music infrastructure lacked in 2010 (see chapter 3). Ahmed Benchemsi, then editor-in-chief of the Francophone weekly *TelQuel*, ticked off the consensus in a 2008 editorial: album production “depends on the whims of sponsors”; Morocco as a whole had little recording or performance infrastructure, and Casablanca had “not one concert hall (or even rehearsal space) to its name”; cultural activities were dominated by the Institut Français and Instituto Cervantes instead of Moroccan-led organizations; and the Moroccan Bureau of Author’s Rights (BMDA) is an “administrative aberration that no one understands” (Benchemsi 2008).⁸

NAAR co-founder Mohamed Sqalli links what artists see as infrastructural deficiencies, and what I have characterized as underdevelopment, to the larger global north market for representations of Arab identities. Describing his decision to ask American music magazine *The Fader* to premiere “Money Call,” a Franco-Moroccan collaboration featuring Shobee of Shayfeen and shot in Meknes, he explained,

That’s what I told you . . . about authenticity and the power of storytelling—by doing this rap project, I knew that it was going to be successful for this kind of media, that is always in research of these kind of projects. And now our objective is not to stick to that. . . . Because all the social things that I can say with NAAR . . . I think it’s important in the beginning, but now I know it’s important that these [Moroccan] guys

are considered only as what they are, which is like artists who work all the time and who have high ambitions of succeeding in music. I don't want people to think that they are here only because of their stories and the fact that they come from a poor country . . . and it's really hard to prevent the media to focus only on that. (interview, Paris-Washington, DC, May 2018)⁹

With his colleague, photographer Ilyes Griyeb, Sqalli walks through why contemporary ways North Africans are made visible and audible in popular culture continue the colonialist gaze. They argue that “what makes Arab societies interesting is often symptomatic of their social and economical challenges. . . . What we see is . . . something like an offsite moodboarding of their socioeconomical weaknesses” (Sqalli 2017). Taking as axiomatic that “culture is a market,” NAAR points out that “Western cultural industries are so powerful that Arab artists can only exist in Europe thanks to public . . . [funding] bodies.”¹⁰ In our conversation, Sqalli described this as a pitfall of the governmental support that Moroccan artists so often envied. “Most of the times Moroccan artists are only promoted in public media in France, like France24, or TV5monde, or RFI . . . who are funded by public money to promote different cultures. And Moroccan artists are always there for an audience of old people, you know? . . . It's not representative of the youth and the vitality of the Moroccan scene” (interview, Paris-Washington, DC, May 2018).

Based on their understanding that the discourses of discovery powering world music markets were just as relevant in pop, NAAR highlighted those musicians from so-called exotic places doing perfectly global-north work. In this way, the third-generation artists promoted by NAAR in the late 2010s—including Shayfeen, LeGrande Toto, Madd, and Issam Harris—found themselves in a situation very similar to that of the leading first-generation artists in the mid-2000s. For both generations, after years of work reaching wide recognition within Morocco, artists were pressured to leverage their own exoticization to reach beyond North African audiences in their European performances.

As Sqalli explained, after the success of “Money Call” and his artists’ first Parisian concert, “we had a lot of solicitations I didn't answer . . . from media wanting to talk only about, you know, this narrative consisting to say they were poor people with difficult family backgrounds who have only rap music to succeed. And . . . we didn't want to stick to that vision, because, you know, it's bigoted. And Shayfeen are not bigoted” (interview, Paris-Washington, DC, May 2018). Musicians who understood themselves as part of translocal and transnational formations were frequently reminded, whether through discrimination or celebration, that the difference ascribed to them in global north narratives was heard before or in place of their music. That difference is not granted the texture of their own unique lives, but fitted to an existing narrative about the value of the hip hop arts to impoverished urban youths.¹¹

From this perspective, authenticity—here as a non-Westerner and Muslim as well as a hip hop artist—is both factual and manufactured, empowering and

compelled, desirable and limiting. As Sqalli and Griyeb powerfully pointed out, “By fetishizing misery[,] . . . Western creatives decide to ignore a colonization of ideas that cannot be legitimized by their global freedom of circulation” (2017). Even as NAAR, Shayfeen, and the other members of Shayfeen’s collective comment on and react against the strictures of the world music industry, the pop industry insists on confirming its own narrow expectations.¹²

Artists like Shayfeen responded in familiar ways to recurrent challenges. In a documentary produced for the Moroccan television channel 2M, director Fatim Zahra Bencherki captures the frustrations and motivations powering every generation of Moroccan hip hop through statements from Shobee, Small X, and their friends and family. As they discuss issues that returned again and again in the music and narratives of earlier hip hop artists, such as unsupportive family members, the failures of the educational system, mass unemployment and visible poverty, the ways the state surveilled hip hop in the 2000s, or the emptiness of patriotic music, they return to two interrelated themes: first, “whatever you do, concentrate on it until you arrive” at a high level, and second, “rely only on yourself” (Small X in Bencherki 2019).

After two decades in which artists and listeners judged how well hip hop artists analyzed the ineluctable inequities of Moroccan life, Shayfeen “don’t want to fall into the ‘consciousness-raising’ thing. We’re not here for that. . . . Music is what saved Abdelssamad [Small X] and me. We want to give people who listen to us . . . even a little hope” (Shobee in Bencherki 2019). Instead of thinking of their performances as sources of education, galvanizing anger, or insights into the lives of the poor, they focused on the opportunity to produce and feel positive affects.

To some, trap artists’ rejection of an earlier emphasis on progress reads as lack of a future-facing vision altogether. For these listeners, Shayfeen’s and others’ statements create a tragic narrative matched by trap’s semiotics of woozy timbres, narrowly repetitive melodies, and vocalized sounds enhancing or replacing the expressiveness of lyrics. However, new-generation artists’ recognition that they can do little or nothing about the country’s ills can crystalize into pointed ambition. As Mohamed Sqalli commented, “Shobee . . . has had this vision for years now. . . . He managed his band . . . just like a label manager. . . . Even if there was no industry, he worked like there was an industry.” While first-generation hip hop artists may not recognize its expression, this is one way that they laid a road effectively. Their discourse of self-creation and self-entrepreneurship has been taken up in a way few could have achieved in the 2000s.

Artists’ narratives about Morocco’s chronic inequality and social and political immobility have changed shape, sound, and emphasis over time. Yet multiple generations, literally and metaphorically, of hip hop practitioners have focused on individualization and responsabilization in a way that responds to their post-colonial country’s neocolonial role in the global market economy. Chronic complaints about Morocco’s lack of music infrastructure are slowly receding for those

with access to newer studios, rehearsal spaces, mixing and mastering services, and venues catering to the affluent. Yet even practitioners without access to these are deeply invested in building a system in which, by definition, only a small percentage of artists would be able to make a living. Simultaneously, practitioners' texts, performances, and actions mitigate against the idea that, in a nation where un- and underemployment is a defining feature of urban life, one's value to the economy should be the only way one is valued. Within the genre that most explicitly validates neoliberal rhetoric of the inexhaustible worker-turned-capitalist, practitioners shape themselves and each other to become deeply motivated human capital as a practice of freedom.

THE SINCERITY OF CAPITAL

N' aich ki bghit, euro euro euro euro
N' aich ki bghit, njibha devise devise devise devise
 ...
Hadi nasiha machi chi clash
Tay' arfona kamline men yamat La Cage

GHOST PROJECT X DRAGANOV, "KI BGHIT" (2017)

"I live how I want," sings Draganov in the chorus to "Ki Bghit" (2017). Moving so fluidly between Derija and French that they sound like a single language, and relying on trap's conventions of repetition, he creates layers of potential meaning from the pairing of *euro* and *devise* (currency, in French). One might hear the second line as simply underscoring the first statement. Or one could hear "N' aich ki bghit, njibha (I live how I want, I get it)" as the credo (*la devise*) Draganov is declaring he holds.

In the second couplet above, the emcee Hoofer, who has made hip hop since at least the early 2000s, ends his verse with reassurance: "This is advice, not some clash / They've known all of us since the days of La Cage." An iconic site in Moroccan hip hop history, many Casablancans of the first generation credit this club's hip hop nights with introducing them to the newest tracks from the United States in the 1990s "just as soon as they were released in the US" and with allowing them to build networks with other lovers of the genre (p.c., Barry, October 21, 2009; see chapter 1). Hoofer places himself in his city and era with this line, authenticating himself as the right person to give advice.

The song itself enacts this statement in its sounds and its relationships. Opening with the filtered, sluggish, auto-tuned timbre of Draganov's sung chorus, it next proceeds to a verse by M-Doc before arriving at Hoofer. M-Doc's vocal timbre and rhythms strongly recall Dr. Dre, invoking the 1990s West Coast hip hop he has emulated throughout his career and provoking a productive unease against the trap-influenced beat. Hoofer splits the chronological difference, building reoccurring rhythmic patterns and rhyme schemes throughout

his verse, dropping a self-referential punchline yet delivering his lines within a restrained melody.

Preceded and followed by Draganov's chorus and verse, embedded in a beat featuring signature sounds of that year's trap, the two emcees' voices are enfolded into a sound from the future of their styles. Ghost Project—a collective including first- and second-generation musicians—joins with a leader of the new generation, Draganov, to simultaneously benefit from their expertise and to bring them credibility with younger listeners. As the styling of their names and the music indicate, this is less a “featuring” and more a strategic partnership.

These juxtaposed rhymes help me recapitulate interrelated themes of this book. As discussed in the introduction, for me these themes take the shape of pairs held together by their constitutive tensions. Just as competition was often (though not always) mediated by solidarity, the inability to avoid one's complicity was often mediated by sincerity. The parallel repetitions of “euro” and “devise” in the chorus of “Ki Bghit” neatly illustrate how hip hop and trap anticipate my argument: once “devise” is heard simultaneously as “currency” and as “credo,” the pair may then take on an additional sense in which euros are the credo itself. Put more simply, market structures as well as market actions both express and encourage deeply held values. As I have attempted to show, inclusion into markets for music, for labor, or for representations of otherness allows those who control the terms of inclusion to profit from difference, regardless of whether the included actors also profit or even understand themselves as equal partners in the exchange.

The ability to hold these pairs in tension together, when market structures and interactions so often and so clearly sustain inequality, I call the sincerity of capital. On one level, this is a simple syllogism: if one consciously develops one's human capital, acting as its manager and bearer, then one's sincerely felt expressions are expressions of that capital. On another level, the space my interlocutors crafted with each other, away from their families, homes, lineages, and religious ties, allowed for sincere investments in a different future—one sought through and felt in collective efforts toward commercial success.

Originated by Gary Becker, Foucault reads “human capital” as reorienting economists' understanding away from a quantitative conception of labor as interchangeable units of time and toward skills and practices that were inalienable from the laborer (Foucault 2008: 226). This produces, for Foucault, a reevaluation of *homo oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, a person encouraged to think of themselves as a firm with assets whose purpose was growth. How that self-entrepreneur then relates this identity to other ways of thinking about the self—notably as a being with the same intrinsic value as other beings, perhaps endowed with this value by a higher power—is not typically discussed in the Foucauldian literature on neoliberal subjectification; rather, the emphasis is on how *neoliberalism* *newly* crowds out or subsumes older forms of self-making (e.g., Brown 2003 and 2015; Donzelot 2008; Read 2009; McNay 2009).¹³ Yet the intersection of neoliberal

discourses on the self with equally compelling, equally naturalized understandings of selfhood is not only the location from which my interlocutors seek locally valorized freedoms, build solidarity, and make art; it is where all of us live.

Much theorizing from the global north focuses on aspirational discourses of entrepreneurship. Even when these are expressions of cruel optimism (Berlant 2011), tracing the implicit contradiction of “ideologies through which structurally dislocated men reinforce hegemonic norms” helps link massive structures to individual life chances (Matlon 2016: 1017).¹⁴ Like many others, I take quite seriously the narratives of those who frame their actions in a capitalist relation to themselves as simultaneous personal and financial development. However, when attempting to intervene in transnational markets, my interlocutors’ opportunities to build enterprises of and for themselves are indistinguishable from self-commodification. The structures they can access value them primarily as salable representations of themselves, in part because they lack other forms of capital with which to pursue other strategies.

Becker understood human capital as inalienable from the subject, but when that capital is difference that is desirable precisely because global north subjects use it as a technology of social and ethical development, the human carrying the capital is more objectified the further they circulate. For my interlocutors, this has occurred across contexts and despite varied socioeconomic locations, whether the form of circulation is in person to a European city, virtually to an unmapped audience, or textually as a representation of a vexed subject position in this book. The global south artist’s successful insertion into global markets for difference can be described as neither forced nor unforced, authentic or inauthentic, but a process by which racialized actors experience inclusion without equalization.

One’s ability to capitalize oneself, to offer oneself as this form of difference-capital, enables better circulation in markets for commodities like representations of Blackness or Arabness.¹⁵ This may afford incisive critique—as Moten notes, “the commodity whose speech sounds embodies the critique of value, of private property, of the sign” (2003: 12)—while it responds to the desires that produce the market itself. By exercising one’s speech to better compete as a silenced object, actors produce moving, polysemic work as they move through and with their complicities.

In this sense, I imagine the sincerity of capital as that which allows practitioners to invest their energy in imagining and building toward ethical circulation, to hold one’s selfhood in productive tension with one’s self-objectification as a commodity. Speech from within this tension is impossible, or rather unintelligible, without a technology of linkage and repair—the affect of sincerity.¹⁶

As I’ve argued throughout, equating entrepreneurship and the embrace of market rationalities with full and natural personhood, as theorists have argued is a hallmark of how neoliberalized subjects imagine themselves, does not negate the passionate attachments and caring labor of those subjects. My interlocutors are

perfectly sincere in their attempts to both build and benefit from markets and to care for themselves and others; in fact, the former is conceptualized as a form of the latter. To return to “Ki Bghit,” Hoofer’s verse, boastful and competitive in classic hip hop style, closes with solidarity with the younger generation. Draganov’s insistence, through repetition, on the primacy of cash readily evokes both the urgency and the deadening of poverty. Among transnational hip hop’s listeners and detractors, statements like his have been read generously as an indictment of inequality or uncharitably as too materialist. When artists acknowledge themselves as materialist, the position is rendered legible, rational, or even ethical through analysis of that inequality. To survive, one cannot avoid complicity with neoliberalized practices and institutions; to thrive, one must feel sincerely attached to some aspects of neoliberalization.

If humans work on themselves to become better human capital, then working on one’s community also generates a form of that capital-in-waiting or capital-in-speculation. In this way, we might theorize my interlocutors’ unsparing labor in and for their musical communities as simultaneously productive of material and nonmaterial value, of present and future capital. The community production of individuals with use-value—individuals whose often unpaid nonperformance work is vital to the success of artists—is simultaneously the cultivation of future, latent, exchange value that may reside in another member of the community. Producing oneself and others as noncommodities who love their art forms and believe in their beauty and value simultaneously prepares the ground on which exchange-value might suddenly appear in the future. Actions that may build potential future value are necessarily relational—that is, they afford and are afforded by specificities. Social reproduction by practitioners of all genders is vital not just to the bonds that sustain the few who perform remunerated labor, but to producing the belief in and possibility of future capital. In this way, solidarity can be simultaneously a source of well-being and an economic imperative (Struch 2022: 75).

Anthropologist Michael Lambek argues that “ethical” and “market” value must be understood as “incommensurable.” In his comparison, *“Economics chooses between commensurable values operative under a single meta-value while ethics judges among incommensurable values or meta-values”* (2008: 145, italics in original). Lambek’s terms describe economics itself as a market that renders values similar via their possibility of exchange, thus using “market” as a synecdoche for “economy” or perhaps capitalism. I have argued that, for my interlocutors, ethics exist under a single meta-value of surviving in a market economy that functions by devaluing the excluded before reincluding them as circulating objects. They cannot afford to understand the economic as outside, rather than as intrinsic to, the cultural or political. My interlocutors demonstrate that, for them, economic expressions of value have acknowledged and profound affective value, not least because creating and participating in translocal and transnational markets helps to delineate one to oneself and others as a proper modern subject.

Finally, I have sought throughout to note when the subjectification framework, as articulated by Wendy Brown and others, illustrates well what my interlocutors have done and are doing, and when their actions exceed it. At the same time, I recognize my own desire to understand practitioners as “inhabit[ing] a certain mode of subjection in order to . . . turn it against its instigators” (Feher 2009: 23), to see and hear a way out of neoliberalization in the insights of Moroccan musicians. Rather than categorize actions within or beyond theoretical models of neoliberal subjectification, I have attempted to dwell on “the ambivalence of subjectification” (Binkley 2011: 85) by introducing complicity as a frame: the historically situated, power-saturated, lived environment in which people strategize among limited options and in which they live continuously, despite generational and economic changes with enormous social, cultural, and political effects.

Throughout, I have argued that relations of complicity render sincerity both necessary to social relations and insufficient to moral life under neoliberalism. This is as true of me as it is of my interlocutors. I apprehend the complicit social world as a web of intersecting, seemingly self-regenerating relationships—a hall of mirrors in which moral reasoning must take place in perpetuity. This applies equally well to work like this book, academy-facing writing that seeks to provoke others’ thinking in a way the author wishes would lead, in likely untraceable ways, to more just action.

One of the earliest exchanges I had during fieldwork concerned outside observers’ habit of eliding the temporality of non-Western art and artists—one of the “reflexes” that journalist Reda Zine describes in the first epigraph at the beginning of this epilogue. During our initial meeting, I mentioned to Don Bigg the 2007 documentary *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco*. Bigg scoffed at the reference, despite having significant airtime in the film. He was less annoyed about the fact that it had barely screened in Morocco than he was that footage from 2003 and 2004 was only circulating in 2008 and 2009. “It ain’t showing us in a professional way,” he said in his hip hop–inflected English (p.c., October 21, 2009).

Viewers might reasonably assume, he feared, that Morocco was five years behind the sounds and fashions of transnational hip hop. More broadly, the struggles on which the documentary focused—young artists seeking social, municipal, and financial support for a live concert—recapitulated tropes in which the majority of Arab societies reject Western media and mores, choosing particularity and tradition over transnationalism, modernity, and “professionalism.” While Bigg was not suggesting hip hop had reached mainstream acceptance—as he noted in his epigraph at the beginning of this epilogue, few regarded hip hop as “a confirmed culture” in 2009—he was concerned about inadvertently supporting stereotypes of Arab backwardness.¹⁷

I am lucky to have had that conversation and remain grateful to Bigg and others who articulated this concern in spoken and unspoken ways. If, as David Crawford

writes, ethnographers “implicitly convert space to time,” ineluctably sharing that outcome with the explicit goals of our colonialist disciplinary ancestors, then our rhetorical and argumentative tactics may bring the simultaneous past closer or push it away (2014: 20). Yet, as Crawford puts it, “a known past is known only because it has been conceived in us presently for our immediate purposes” (2014: 23). The further away I move from the majority of my fieldwork in time, the clearer my own investment in an economy of knowledge-making appears. Like other capitalist markets, academic knowledge-making prizes innovations (or “interventions”) and rests on an assumption of limitless accumulation. As in other complexities my interlocutors and I have shared, this book participates in this economy seemingly without the possibility of escape. Writing out the conditions of participation as a form of critique, as this epilogue has done, simply occupies the place of theoretical intervention and functions as a contribution to the intellectual market—regardless of how well that contribution is received. Like NAAR anticipating audiences’ desire for difference, like first-generation artists leveraging hip hop’s aesthetics of refusal to construct their own way to belong, my attempt to analyze the project in which I participate contests its terms without the ability to meaningfully resist them.