

ARAB HIP-HOP AND POLITICS OF IDENTITY: INTELLECTUALS, IDENTITY
AND INQUILAB

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to every person of colour, who in the wake of 9/11 became culpable because of their ethnicity, language and religion among other questions of identification we previously considered inconsequential. I also dedicate this thesis to the memory of several intellectuals and scholars who dedicated their lives for causes of social justice; in particular Stuart Hall, who passed away during the writing of this thesis. Additionally, I dedicate this work to Jack Shaheen, without whom studies on Arabs in American popular culture would have probably never matured.

Finally, I dedicate this to my family – Dad, Mom, Amanda and Florence. Though they never grasped the concept of hegemony they never dismissed the idea. This dedication is insignificant in comparison to their support and love.

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Opposing the culture of *différance* created through American cultural media, this thesis argues, Arab hip-hop artists revive the politically conscious sub-genre of hip-hop with the purpose of normalising their Arab existence. Appropriating hip-hop for a cultural protest, Arab artists create for themselves a sub-genre of conscious hip-hop – Arab-conscious hip-hop and function as Gramsci's organic intellectuals, involved in better representation of Arabs in the mainstream. Critiquing power dynamics, Arab hip-hop artists are counter-hegemonic in challenging popular identity constructions of Arabs and revealing to audiences biases in media production and opportunities for progress towards social justice. Their identity (re)constructions maintain difference while avoiding Otherness. The intersection of Arab-consciousness through hip-hop and politics of identity necessitates a needed cultural protest, which in the case of Arabs has been severely limited. This thesis progresses by reviewing literature on politics of identity, Arabs in American cultural media, Gramsci's organic intellectuals and conscious hip-hop. Employing criticism, this thesis presents an argument for Arab hip-hop group, The Arab Summit, as organic intellectuals involved in mainstream representation of the Arab community.

Jonathan P. Rossing, Ph.D., Chair

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ARAB HIP-HOP AND POLITICS OF IDENTITY:

Intellectuals, Identity and Inquilab¹

Introduction

Through fact or fiction, power relations construct Otherness causing a negotiation of identity, making the Other susceptible to “isms” of discrimination. Scholars repeatedly discuss Otherness in America in terms of Black and White relations (Blauner, 1989; Coe & Schmidt, 2012; De B'éri & Hogarth, 2009), overlooking endeavours for social justice by other ethnic groups. South Americans, peoples of Asian heritage and Arabs face different forms of discrimination in America. Peculiar, however, is the combined discrimination by varied groups against Arabs. Despite being American by nationality, Arab Americans are the quintessential Other in America. Additionally, the global influence of American popular culture affects audience perceptions about Arabs in different countries, making Arabs the ultimate enemy worldwide. Though in recent times the devastation witnessed on 9/11 adjudges Arabs, a genealogy (adopting from Foucault) of prejudice exists against Arabs, carried forward through cartoons, comics, literature, movies, music and television (Christison, 1987; Michalak, 1988; Rana, 2007; Shaheen, 1984, 1994, 2003). A culture of *différance* (adopting from Derrida) dictates the Arab existence, necessitating a renewed identity.

Rather than romanticising social justice, Edward Said advises intellectuals to apply themselves realistically against systems of oppression. Said (2007) believed, “We cannot fight for our rights and our history as well as future until we are armed with weapons of criticism and dedicated consciousness” (p. 233). The essence of

¹ Inquilab (انقلاب) is the Arabic and Urdu word for revolution. The usage is uncommon in regular vocabulary but was popularised during the Indian struggle for independence as “*inquilab zindabad*” (Long Live the Revolution). Other than being a convenient inclusion in the title, *inquilab* is interpreted as an ongoing struggle against colonialism, imperialism and subordination; which in a conversation of social hierarchies, most cultural and critical scholars would agree with.

Said's appeal is a universal denouncement of ideologically driven mechanisms. Said (1979, 1980, 1997) views Otherness as an ideological construct maintaining power in society. Thus, today's Arab identity is perennial Orientalism (Kumar, 2012). America continues imagining into existence a savage Arab world complemented with distorted images and diabolic rhetoric by media, influencing policies and politics. The connection between American foreign policy and American popular and socio-political culture is extant (Steuter, 1990). In recent memory, the "war on terror" gained approval through media cooperation and President Bush's ability to conjure dread against Arabs and Muslims with popular culture dependent discourses (Merskin, 2004; Nacos et al 2011). However, when attitudes and policies lead to wars and physical harm on American citizens, Arabs need to realise the extent of their subjugation and exert their acceptance as equal members of American society. Notwithstanding, communities bestow such responsibility of creating acceptance through representation upon specific members of the community.

Representing Arabs, such individuals function as organic intellectuals who introduce awareness of the Arab community to society. Organic intellectuals actively engage society in deconstructing the Arab identity and simultaneously create opportunities for reconstructing the Arab identity. In America and elsewhere, surprisingly, Arabs have taken up typically American cultural mediums to do so – one, stand-up comedy (Amarasingam, 2010) and two, hip-hop. Confronting their Otherness, Arab comedians as organic intellectuals address Arabophobia and Islamophobia in post-9/11 America (Amarasingam, 2010). Crucial to deconstructing the popular Arab identity is asserting their "American-ness" despite their difference. Amarsingam argues organic intellectuals alter perceptions about Arabs, and in doing so uplift the Arab community. After 9/11, Arab hip-hop artists actively protested their

Otherness alongside other representatives. Artists from the Arab world, Britain, other parts of Europe and Northern America dedicated their musical careers to create a dialogue about being Arab. Their identity being dominantly configured by American popular culture, however, makes America the subject of their contention. The artists engage their audiences against social practices establishing conditions for subordination. As politically conscious artists their music overturns ideologically constructed cultural barriers. Rather than opposing the popular Arab they reinforce a new meaning of Arab. For their audiences – whether the intended audience, actual listeners or constructed audience (Bitzer, 1992) – Arab hip-hop advances Arab politics of identity.

Novel about the intersection of politics of identity, Arabs and hip-hop is the actualisation of a necessary cultural protest. In a culture of difference created through cultural media, this thesis argues, Arab hip-hop artists revive the politically conscious sub-genre of hip-hop and function as organic intellectuals deconstructing the Arab identity. Appropriating hip-hop for a cultural protest, Arab artists create for themselves a sub-genre of conscious hip-hop – Arab-conscious hip-hop. These artists are counter-hegemonic in challenging popular constructions of Arabs as they reveal to audiences biases in media production and opportunities for progress towards social justice. Their politics of identity maintains difference while avoiding Otherness.

The primary artefact – *Fear of an Arab Planet* by The Arab Summit is a collaboration featuring The Narcicyst (Yassin Alsalman), Omar Offendum (Omar Chakaki), Excentrik (Tariq Kazaleh) and one half of The Philistines – Ragtop (Nizar Wattad). The four artists work independently but came together as The Arab Summit to record an album exploring the juxtaposition of Arab culture with the West and the

experience of being Arabs in diaspora. Their experience of Otherness is communicated through hip-hop, which The Narcicyst further articulates:

Omar Offendum, a Syrian-American raised and educated in both Saudi Arabia and Washington D.C., found himself in a self-imposed internal cultural clash born out of both his scholastic and geographical upbringings. Seeking the truth that lies between the kinship of his homeland and his hometown, he picked up a microphone to find the truth in himself. As an Iraqi-Canadian, I [The Narcicyst] found myself stuck between Iraq and a Hard Place; unable to feel grounded in either the East or the West, torn between my motherland and my mother tongue in English. Tariq Kazaleh, a Palestinian-American raised in Detroit, saw himself growing up in an Arab community planted between the heart of America's industrial hub and a city by the bay. Nizar Wattad, also a Palestinian-American, was born in Palestine and raised in Tennessee, metaphorically standing between an Israeli apartheid tank and the southern heartland of America's republican though. These four characters and their individual inner struggles were brought together by the sub-cultural nation of Hip-Hop. Conflicted yet resolute, we joined forces to crush the Fear of an Arab Planet. (Alsalman, 2010, p. 39)

The Arab Summit's critique persuades a deeply political sense of Arab consciousness for their audiences. *Fear of an Arab Planet* "is a powerful cultural snap-chat of the Arab Diaspora in the West" (Christoff, 2007). The Arab Summit identifies Arab struggles and delivers a critical Arab perspective about the Arab history and possible future with the purpose of advancing Arabs' cause for justice.

The following sections consider academic contributions, ongoing conversations and potential gaps to bridge. The literature discusses politics of identity, Arabs' designation as the Other through American popular culture, organic intellectuals and hip-hop. Scholarship on Arabs in American popular culture drastically changed after 9/11, thus the literature focuses extensively on contributions before 9/11, because as argued ahead, the Arab identity, if possible, is further exaggerated after 9/11. Pre-9/11 constructions of Arabs provide the framework for post-9/11 examination. Hip-hop scholarship frequently reviews the historical development of the genre which is irrelevant to a study on Arabs' recent adoption of

hip-hop. Furthermore, considering scholarship on Arab hip-hop in North America is absent, the literature is centred on conscious hip-hop. Ahead, I discuss criticism as a method of enquiry and employing criticism, I argue for The Arab Summit as organic intellectuals. The Discussion, titled “Arab Intellectualism and the Future,” considers limitations and the importance of public pedagogy.

Literature Review

Identity reconstruction necessitates deconstructing the popular (myths and) identity by reinterpreting difference in order to gain social acceptance; importantly through, difference should not fracture the social fabric. As an approach to seeking social membership – politics of identity addresses concerns of civil polity. Advancing pluralism, politics of identity advocates for social integration through factual representation, such that difference adds to society's development.

Politics of Identity

Anspach (1979) introduced politics of identity in reference to activism by disabled and handicapped groups focused on transforming societal conceptions about disabilities and handicap. Over the next decade, scholars expanded politics of identity to include ethnicity's role in contesting politics (Ross, 1982), critical pedagogy (Bromley, 1989) and efforts exploring cultural identities (Connolly, 1990).

Representing various marginalised experiences, politics of identity developed into a vital discourse within cultural politics. Scholars discussing politics of identity of various groups created counter-narratives proposing new ideological spaces and new social practices. These efforts, however, substituted one "master narrative" for another, revealing a separatist ideology in politics of identity (Giroux, 1994). Politics of identity challenged prevailing hegemonic practices, nevertheless failed to move beyond notions of "being different." Insistence on difference slowed politics of identity because radicalism became associated with desires to maintain difference. Scott (1992) describes such persistence on impassable difference as "imitation of the powerful" because politics of identity replaced dominance with dominance. Willis (1991) further expands upon this exchange of dominance:

The appeal of “identity politics” is that it arises from a radical insight – that domination is systematically structured into the relations between social groups. The problem is that [politics of identity] gives rise to a logic that chokes off radicalism and ends up by supporting domination. If the present obsession with group identity as the basis of politics is hard to imagine, much less build a broad-based radical collectivity, it has even more tellingly stood in the way of a principled commitment to the freedom and happiness of individuals, without which no genuine radicalism is possible. (p. 58)

Willis emphasises on radicalism because the associated separatism became irreconcilable. Therefore, Willis argued to perceive politics of identity as representation of difference. Addressing Willis’ suggestions, politics of identity consciously avoided separatism while maintaining difference and focused on representing marginalised groups into the mainstream. Specific to this period, Fiske (1992) explains difference as “bottom-up differences which are socially and historically specific [...but not] idealist versions of free will” (p. 161). Further, Staszak (2009) presents difference and Otherness as products of asymmetrical power relations. According to Lipman (1989) difference in the mainstream became “less on finding similarities between conflicting realities, concepts, and goals and more on recognising the differences between them” (p. 15-16). Hall (1987) expands on difference with a personal insight:

The fact is "black" has never been just there either. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found. People now speak of the society I come from in totally unrecognizable ways. Of course Jamaica is a black society, they say. In reality it is a society of black and brown people who lived for three or four hundred years without ever being able to speak of themselves as "black." Black is an identity which had to be learned and could only be learned in a certain moment. In Jamaica that moment is the 1970s. (p. 45)

Theorists, thusly, focused on understanding difference as construct to maintain power and politics of identity continued because it remains “fundamental to any discourse or

social movement that believed in radical renewal of democratic society” (Giroux, 1994, p. 35).

Contemporary scholars prefix politics of identity with “new cultural” or phrase politics of identity as “new cultural politics of representation,” conspicuously addressing previous theorisations. Contemporary scholarship extends from nationalist discourses of Louis Farrakhan to progressive discourses on ethnic differences by Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1990; Giroux, 1994; Hall, 1996). Today, history and ideology complexly intertwine with politics of identity exposing relevancy of current social practices and validating them for the future (Said, 1997; Treacher, 2005). Most importantly, politics of identity is “decisively a question of empowerment” (Friedman, 1992). Renewed politics of identity emphasises critical awareness of power dynamics. Politics of identity pursues social justice in pluralistic societies, achievable through politicisation of identities. Politics of identity, at the same time, enables holistic identity constructions in society, and with respect to Arabs – truer identity constructions. According to West (1999), “distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity...and historicise, contextualise, and pluralise by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing” (p. 118). Further,

The new cultural politics of difference are neither simply oppositional in contesting the mainstream for inclusion, nor transgressive in the avant-gardist sense of shocking conventional bourgeois audiences. Rather they are distinct articulations of talented contribution to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralised, demobilized, depoliticised and disorganised people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality. (p. 120)

Politics of identity reconceptualises difference for a democratic society. Hall and Held explain, “The diversity arenas in which citizenship is being claimed and contested

today is essential to any modern conception of it because it is inscribed in the very logic of modern society” (p. 176). Said otherwise, politics of identity understands dynamics of ideology, hegemony, dominance and subordination. Central to the struggle of identity is to rethink and rewrite (adopting from Giroux) difference in relation to national and cultural membership. With cultures coming in contact with each other, questions of representation become intertwined with issues of power and identity (Giroux, 1994). Escoffier (1991) acknowledges, America has become increasingly obsessed with diversity in terms of ethnicity and race and conflicts within. Therefore, politics of identity transitions societies into multiculturalism challenging social hierarchies for socio-political transformation.

Despite the stress on representation, politics of identity lacks an understanding of identity. Hall (1990) suggests, instead of conceiving identity as already existing, think of identity as a perpetual production. An ongoing conception of identity requires reflexivity and a constant becoming. Therefore, alongside ideology, hegemony and dominance, identity is constantly reproduced. Mouffe (1992) elucidates, “The identities qua individual and qua citizen [...] exist in a permanent tension that can never be reconciled” (p. 32). Prevailing identities being hegemonic constructions and contested identities being counter-hegemonic constructions create a symbiosis within which hegemony and counter-hegemony contest. Conceiving identity, Hall (1990) provides two methods – one, “a superficial or artificially imposed” identity, and two, an identity “constituting ‘what we really are’ rather than ‘what we have become’” (p. 223-225). I propose politics of identity be conceived through the latter because it emphasises the historicity of identity constructions.

One drawback to politics of identity has been the conflation of identities (Somers, 1994). A singular identity functions as a potential gap of this thesis; because

in contesting an Arab identity there is a need to advance the entire community before arguing for categorical identities. There are multiple aspects governing identities – race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender, religion, etc.; all separate, nonetheless, they maintain overlapping characteristics with the primary identity. At this point, I consolidate diverse Arab identities while understanding its limitations.

Arabs in American Cultural Media

Before 9/11

Politics of identity stresses an understanding of the genealogy of prejudice, and in that, how are prevailing identities constructed. Focused on deconstructions and reconstructions of the Arab identity, what follows here reviews Arab representations in American cultural media. Media critic, Jack Shaheen contributes significantly to the pre-9/11 literature but there is paucity of literature since because literature post-9/11 limits itself in its focus on the effects of 9/11 on Arab communities.

Scholarly conversations about Arabs, Arabs in the West and Arabs in Western media are incomplete without considering arguments by Edward Said and Jack Shaheen. Though separate arguments, Said and Shaheen dedicated their careers arguing for better representations of Arabs in a cause-and-effect manner. Shaheen (1994) argues the earliest Arab portrayals in American media were in 1920s. Images from then and images that followed into present are irresponsible adaptations of Europe's Jewish caricatures (Christison, 1987; Michalak, 1988; Shaheen, 2009). Said's (1979) critique of Orientalism predates Shaheen's earliest contribution on the topic, but is solidified with respect to cultural media by Shaheen's argument. Said (1997) presented "the affiliation of knowledge with power" (p. xlix). The West imagined the East into existence, creating knowledge of it, and articulated Western

interests through it, maintaining power over it. Arguing against control over people's lives Said (1979) affirms, "Orientals [i.e., Arabs] were rarely seen or looked at, they were seen through, analysed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly converted their territory – taken over" (p. 207). Orientalism is a master discourse that constructed and polarised the Arabs.

Ibn Warraq (2007) argued against Orientalism, defining the West as rational, universal and self-critical. Warraq further argues that other cultures did not possess Occidental values. More explicitly, people of colour are incapable of progress and if not for colonialists and Christian missionaries, people of colour would still be languishing. Hamdi (2013) articulates this argument stating, denying "the Orientalist representation whether in literature in history and politics is contaminated by power and interest is to deny the reality of imperialism and its machinery" (p. 145). In addition to imagining the East into existence through the "Oriental gaze," the West placed itself in opposition to the East. Michalak (1988) argues, "We project the negation of our values and the enactment of our taboos" (p. 33) into the Arab identity. Above all, Arabs' designation as the ultimate enemy proves Orientalism is still alive, noticeable in American media and increasingly evident in post-9/11 discourse.

Shaheen (1997) argues the average American psyche is configured by mass media – comics, cartoons, movies, music, news, novels and television shows – to hate and fear Arabs. Shaheen (1990) laments that instead of entertaining, unwarranted portrayals of Arabs obscures reality and narrows viewers' perception. Over the years, Shaheen (1980, 1984, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2009, 2012) produced compelling evidence proving American media vilifies and slanders Arabs, and also proves Orientalism persists. Misrepresentations create a "habit of radical and cultural

discrimination” (Shaheen, 2009, p. 6). Although, Hollywood’s Arab is the sinister character, such portrays affect how Arabs are generally perceived. Despite continued discrimination through various media outlets, Arabs have made limited attempts to protest their slanderous identity. In fact, Arabs’ media subordination represses identities in an attempt to avoid public persecution (Michalak, 1988). Tamer (2010) claims discrimination against other ethnic groups is declining but discrimination against Arabs has either remained the same or has increased. Tamer further argues, “Arab Americans are considered “outsiders” to the definition of a U.S. citizen” (p. 115-116). With no other social groups do cultural producers actively prove political illegitimacy, social underdevelopment and violent tendencies.

Arab stereotypes are further exaggerated in the Palestinian cause. If Arabs are generally villainous, Palestinians in particular are a deplorable nefarious group (Shaheen, 1990). According to Shaheen, since Israel’s conception and development of diplomatic alliances with America, Palestinians have been deliberate portrayed as terrorists. Palestinians are always the aggressors, never the victims. S. D. Ross (2003) summarily highlights the effects of disproportionate coverage on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

The editorials portray Palestinians as members of an antiquated, murderous caste consumed by old hatreds, constantly stoking tensions with peace-loving Israelis, and intent upon eliminating the state of Israel. Palestinians are stereotyped as racist, anti-Semitic, terrorist suicide bombers. Palestinians are never presented as moral victims. The need for Palestinian sovereignty and security is routinely presented as secondary to the same interests of the Israelis. What Israel deserves, Palestine is only begrudgingly and conditionally granted. And it is Arabs, not Palestinians, who are linked to editorial discussions of cease-fires, diplomatic efforts, and the peace process. (p. 61)

Shaheen (1990) further contributes on media coverage of the conflict arguing:

What is forgotten in all this is that the great majority of Palestinians, like all other human beings, seek peace and abhor violence. Yet, on

silver screen Palestinians, adorned in fatigues and kuffiyehs [Arab headgear], almost never appear as victims of violence or even as normal human beings. When, if ever, has the viewer seen a Palestinian embracing his wife or children, writing poetry, or attending the sick? As journalist Edward R. Murrow said, what we do not see it often as important, if not more important, as what we do see. (p. B2-B3)

Media skews the history of the conflict in favour of Israel and never condemns for apartheid policies against Arabs, Muslims and immigrant Africans. Media demonises Palestinians and associates their (and Arab) culture and tradition with violence. Such bigotry affects audience attitudes and repetition lends validity to perceptions.

American cultural media, moreover, has an Orientalist view towards Islam, due to popular erroneous association of Arabs with Islam. However, it were Orientalists who first declared Muslims a race (Kumar, 2012), and thus present day connotations of race and religion. Said (1997) remarks in *Covering Islam*, linking “Islam” to Orientalism:

One of the points I make here [in *Covering Islam*] and in Orientalism is that the term “Islam” as it is used today seems to mean one simple thing but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam. (p. 1)

Such ideologically-driven construction enables the West to perceive Muslims as Muslims alone, under the “nation” of Islam without other allegiances. Islam was added to America’s cultural heritage because Islam became linked with the 1970’s Oil Crisis, Iran (to be noted that Iranians are not Arab), Afghanistan and terrorism (Said, 1997). However, instead of objective media reporting, Americans were presented with “crude essentialised caricatures” (p. 28). Said links the “Islamic phenomenon” with America’s quest to maintain dominance over the Arab world. Insinuations against Islam made Arabs and Muslims prime suspects in time of adversity. Said remarked, which remains true today, “a corps of “experts” on the Islamic world has grown to prominence, and during a crisis they are brought out to pontificate on formulaic ideas

about Islam on new programs or talk shows” (p. xi). “Arab,” “Islam” and “terrorism” generate pre-configured images of decadence and violence. Alongside other media, news coverage maintains unanimous prejudice against Arabs. Collectively, Arabs are misrepresented; or Palestinians and “Islam” are equifinal objects of venom.

Literature presented until this point discussed the Arab identity before events of 9/11. Arabs were always America’s enemy created through Orientalism. However, as I will highlight further, the Arab identity is still constructed through the Oriental gaze. American mass culture before 9/11 exacerbated the situation after 9/11.

After 9/11

Following the events of 9/11, a hyperbolic rhetoric re-Orientalised the Arab world (Ivie, 2003). President Bush’s rhetorical card of evil justified America’s fascist wars as long as war avoided further attacks. Bush’s policies conceived a “clash of civilisations” within American borders, which objectively or rhetorically codified people of colour. As a result, scholarship on Arabs drastically shifted. Media criticism focuses extensively on political discourse ignoring instances of Arab misrepresentations (Gerges, 2003; Merskin, 2004; Witteborn, 2004). Nonetheless, scholarship increased the Arab voice academically and culturally (Salaita, 2005).

Howell and Shryock (2003) observe:

In the aftermath of 9/11, Arab and Muslim Americans have been compelled time and again, to apologise for acts they did not commit, to condemn acts they never condoned, and to openly profess loyalties that, for most U.S. citizens are merely assumed. (p. 444)

It is difficult to imagine an Arab different from the devastation witnessed on September 11th. The newly-constructed-old identity, however, dictates Arab lives around the world. Bodily harm on Arabs, Muslims and similar looking people, in the aftermath of 9/11, were ignored as displaced anger (Ahmad, 2004). Ahmad

importantly argues, “The aftermath of 9/11 reminds us that racism, and its companion systems of subordination, remain quintessentially American passions” (p. 1330).

Response to 9/11 unanimously condemned Arabs, Islam and terrorism alike. Once raced as Muslims, Arabs became “raced as terrorists” (Saito, 2001). The “war on terror” culminated into a socio-political disaster (Jiwani, 2011; Love, 2011).

Orientalism expressed through Arabophobia and Islamophobia became institutionalised. Yet, academic and popular opinions fail to condemn the act of terror a response to U.S. military interventions.

In the years preceding 9/11 Arab literary works emerged – *Post-Gibran anthology of new Arab American writing* (Mattawa, 1999) and *Arabs in America: Building a new future* (Suleiman, 1999) – expressing Arab consciousness. Their consciousness was organic self-construction in a polarised world. The partial uplift was depressed following 9/11, only to return more persuasively. Academic and cultural contributors among others emerged as, what Gramsci termed, organic intellectuals.

Organic Intellectuals

According to Gramsci, marginalised groups come to be subordinated through a complex interaction of “objective and subjective” factors (Adamson, 1983; Gramsci & Buttigieg, 1996). Said otherwise, the subordinated are complicit in their subordination by accepting hegemony or not protesting hegemony. However, whenever marginalised groups organise themselves in opposition of hegemony, they seek “conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas” from organic intellectuals (Amarasingam, 2010). Organic intellectuals serve as interlocutors between their social group and society (Adamson, 1983). So stated, Gramsci (1995) noted, everyone can

be an intellectual but not everyone *functions* as an intellectual. There are, additionally, different types of intellectuals – traditional and organic; the former failing to perform a progressive role. Strine (1991) remarks, “traditional intellectuals, set them[selves] apart from the drift of partisan political life” (p. 195). Traditional intellectuals hold privileged positions in society, yet fail to advance their community with their privileged positions. Traditional intellectuals’ socioeconomic status tends to benefit them, and hence they perpetuate dominance. Organic intellectuals hold similar privileges as traditional intellectuals, but they exploit their position “to intervene in hegemonic conception(s) of the world” (p. 195).

Organic intellectuals represent their social group in the mainstream. Strine (1991) summarises the role of organic intellectuals stating:

By closely aligning their theoretical work with their identified social group’s internal struggles for self-empowerment and local sovereignty, organic intellectuals can ideally generate counter-theories of social and cultural process, explanations that are at once historically grounded, contextually nuanced, and politically emancipating. (p. 195)

Organic intellectuals create opportunities for their social group to control narratives dominating their existence (Adamson, 1983). Organic intellectuals disseminate counter-hegemonic consciousness in society introducing notions of self-governance in opposition to existing dominance. However, Gramsci reduces counter-hegemony to opposing “common sense.” Gramsci uses common sense not as a synonym for hegemony but for ideology instead. Common sense is an ideology, “common to a social group, or common to a society as a whole” (Jones, 2007, p. 54). Common sense establishes the ideological space within which hegemony functions but is not hegemony itself. According to Gramsci, organic intellectuals challenge societal common sense; but this simplistic reduction functions on the premise of political utopia. To challenge common sense, according to Gramsci, is to oppose

ideology and never have an ideological space thereafter. Instead of challenging common sense to dissolution, Amarasingam (2010) suggests introducing “new sedimentations.” Sedimentations added to prevailing common sense is realistic is comparison because socio-political relations are a reality. Counter-hegemony functions alongside hegemony, and therefore, an ideological space is necessary to develop counter-hegemony.

Writing on new politics of identity, West reconceptualises Gramsci’s organic intellectual as critical organic catalyst. West’s catalysts are “intellectual freedom fighters” representing marginalised groups in the mainstream. A catalyst working for representation, as West (1999) argues:

... can thrive only if there are communities, groups, organisations, institutions, subcultures, and networks of people of colour who cultivate critical sensibilities and personal accountability – without inhibiting individual expressions, curiosities, and idiosyncrasies. This is especially needed given the escalating racial hostility, violence, and polarisation in the United States. Yet, this critical coming-together must not be a narrow closing of ranks. Rather, it is a strengthening and nurturing endeavour that can forge more solid alliances and coalitions. (p. 136)

Catalysts work towards promotion of difference among marginalised communities. Though intellectuals and/ or catalysts of different groups do not actively associate themselves with their counterparts, at the same time, they do not restrict themselves to their community, creating a sense of collectivism among marginalised groups (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 1996; Jones, 2007). Despite functioning in diverse spheres, the works of intellectuals intersect with each other demanding heterogeneity. There is a shared effort in the work they do for “people of colour” to contest an identity. The challenge for intellectuals, though, is to “overcome de facto segregation in the life of the mind of this country [America]” (West, 1999).

In recent times, cultural appropriation paved the path for social justice. Within America, stand-up comedy and hip-hop have been adopted and adapted by different communities to represent themselves in the mainstream. Adoption of popular cultural mediums establishes cultural membership while providing opportunities to normalise difference. Amarasingam (2010) argues that Arab stand-up comedians function as organic intellectuals by adopting a quintessentially American medium discussing Arabophobia and Islamophobia in post-9/11 America. Arab comedians as representatives “voice the interests of their communities, defend the perception of them in public and aid the community in its fight for recognition” (p. 474). Avila-Saavedra (2011) makes a similar argument, though not for organic intellectuals, stating Latino comedians “articulate an implicit tension between ethnic otherness and desire for assimilation for U.S. Latinos” (p. 272). Interesting about arguments made by Amarasingam and Avila-Saavedra is the cultural appropriation of American popular mediums for mainstream recognition. Using an undeniably American medium creates possibilities of a new ideological space within which new identities can be constructed. Similar cultural appropriation for recognition is in the form of hip-hop, which several groups in U.S. have appropriated.

Hip-Hop

Hip-hop is a political medium (Dery, 1990). Hip-hop develops a culture of resistance (Rose, 1994). Hip-hop is anti-racism (Osumare, 2007). Hip-hop is activism (Higgins, 2009). Hip-hop represents the relationship between real and imagined (Butler, 2004). On one side hip-hop presents a harsh and unpleasant reality, informing listeners about societal problems; and on the other side hip-hop celebrates a life audiences only aspire to. Hip-hop’s appeal, however, lies in artists’ balance of life and

art (Osumare, 2007). Whether scholars applaud or denounced hip-hop, the genre cannot be ignored as an artistic expression – whether political hip-hop or contemporary hip-hop.

Institutional discrimination African Americans endured during the Reagan-Bush era compelled Black hip-hop artists to politicise their music (Hess, 2007). The music produced during that period contributed towards initiating the “hip-hop political movement” (Bynoe, 2004), because artists who infamously celebrated the “thug life” became socially conscious and addressed distraught realities of being Black. Traditional intellectual organisations like the Black Church and civil rights organisations failed to cohere vulnerable youth the way hip-hop artists did with music (Bynoe, 2004). Black conscious artists became “a voice for (the) voiceless” (Higgins, 2009, p. 97). As Chuck D of Public Enemy (Chang, 2007) famously claimed, hip-hop was the “Black CNN.” Hip-hop artists became an important representation the Black community had in mainstream media, bestowing responsibilities of intellectualism upon regular citizens. Through hip-hop, most importantly, artists challenged their community’s subordination and initiated public discourse about African Americans’ inclusion into the mainstream.

At the same time, commercialisation of hip-hop initiated a wave of cultural adoption within America and internationalisation². Internationalisation of hip-hop reinforced the genre as a socio-political narrative for recognition and progress (Kahf, 2007; Malone & Martinez Jr, 2010; Reiter & Mitchell, 2008; Rose, 1994).

Nonetheless, however and whenever appropriated, hip-hop carried messages of Black liberation. Maira and Shihade (2012) argue:

² Hip-hop scholars use the term “globalisation” instead of internationalisation. I choose the latter because globalisation has a connotation of commercial capitalism, which hip-hop opposed in its beginnings. I believe hip-hop scholars should promote hip-hop’s anti-establishment credo.

So while hip-hop has become a hypercommodified youth culture it is also an increasingly transnational and hybridised cultural form that has been transformed by youth around the world and injected into, or produced by, a range of political movements, including those of the Arab Spring. (p. 2)

Hip-hop transformed into a worldwide medium addressing socio-political realities.

Hip hop culture has become associated with identity constructions of the marginalised. Communities who share experiences of discrimination appropriate hip hop (the culture and not just the music) in a unique expression of protest (Kahf, 2007). Malone and Martinez Jr (2010) describe hip-hop as a “grassroots global organiser” recognising audiences’ adoption of the genre for cultural protests. Hip-hop no longer remains solely a Black expression (Mitchell, 2002). Instead, hip-hop is a complex weapon of empowerment.

Hip-hop scholarship attends to cultural appropriation within and outside America; however, literature on Arab hip-hop in North America remains absent. To defend hip-hop scholars, Arab hip-hop is a fledgling genre gaining popularity with the advent of social media and Arab Spring. There is a deep rooted Black aesthetic in hip-hop and conscious Arab hip-hop or Arab-conscious hip-hop is not different from conscious hip-hop other than the context. Rapping about Arabs and the Arab world, Arab hip-hop artists work towards reinventing the Arab identity in mainstream media accommodating popular Arab identities in the space that hip-hop provides. Artists in music videos adopt the orange jumpsuit to bespeak institutional criminalisation of Arabs and Muslims. Artists incorporate into their lyrics words like “Ayrab,” “sand nigger” and other racial epithets and speak out against discrimination. Arab-conscious hip-hop reflects the Arab reality which is enmeshed with their community. Representing the Arab community, artists perform the role of organic intellectuals. Their music critiques social practices but also critically engages listeners. For Arab

listeners, more than putting forth a contested identity, artists put forth what they could have been. Said differently, it is self-criticism – to rethink and rewrite their position in society. Though experiences through hip-hop are delineated by contexts, hip-hop enables identification (Harrison, 2009; Hebdige, 1990). Upholding Black protest culture, conscious artists create the space for their identity in opposition to the mainstream (Quinn, 2005). As Frith (1996) suggests, identity through music is an ongoing process; just like power relations. But identity construction through music, of any genre, is sans boundaries.

Power relations are permanent, making politics of identity a perpetual strife. Contemporary notions of politics of identity stress both – recognition and access to resources (Fraser, 2009). Though either is insufficient, I advance an argument for the former because capital membership belongs in a different conversation about Otherness. Recognition should emphasise belonging (Hall & Held, 1989) yet it is crucial to maintain difference while losing Otherness. Recognition as equals despite differences expunges any stigma associated with difference which leads designation as the Other. If history narrates our present and future (Liu & Hilton, 2005), a struggle for equality should correct history and claim control over narratives and the future. Essential to this struggle is to rethink and rewrite difference. If difference signifies, it also speaks (Hall, 1997). Arabs in America, though not geographically restricted, have upon themselves the task of reconstructing the Arab identity.

Methodology

Ideological criticism, according to West (1999), serves as the method of inquiry for those involved in politics of identity and representation. Ideological criticism understands power dynamics and responds to conditions created thereby. Failing to acknowledge how history and ideology intertwine in the present, as Bourdieu (2001) argues, is to fail to understand the relation between social structures and cognitive structures. Ideological criticism, importantly, enables multi-dimensional analyses. Ideological criticism offers the freedom from “objective” methods permitting prejudiced interpretations in advancing an argument. Therefore my methodology is not to be restricted to ideological criticism. I propose ideological criticism as the primary method, while allowing myself the freedom from a singular method. While this is troubling, it upholds Marxist criticalness. Living critically resists reduction to any mechanism.

Based on the structure of the argument to follow, I interpret texts while creating texts. Interviews by the artists will serve as artefacts in addition to songs from *Fear of an Arab Planet*. Since Arab hip-hop is relatively new and the artists are independent of record labels there is limited public discourse surrounding them and their work. Therefore, I will include interviews before and after collaboration on this album from various sources. Such an approach to criticism is encouraged by McGee (1977) as part of rhetorical criticism. Creating texts for interpretation focuses on the audience, according to McGee. The same purpose remains; however, I am not undermining an audience’s ability to create texts. Instead, as a harbinger introducing a new genre of music to communication studies, I am taking it upon myself to create the texts for an audience who have not been exposed to Arab-conscious hip-hop. The text,

though, is temporarily finished, until more texts contribute to a deeper understanding of the genre.

McGee's (1990) primary concern with rhetorical criticism remains that critics involved in creating and interpreting texts cannot maintain objectivity. Here West's approach to ideological criticism informs rhetorical criticism. According to West, ideological criticism "begins with social structural analysis [and] also makes explicit its moral and political aims. It is partisan, partial, engaged, and crisis-centred, yet always keeps open a sceptical eye to avoid dogmatic traps...or rigid conclusions" (p. 133). Marx famously announced, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx & Simon, 1994, p. 98). Theorising and investigating constantly changing social conditions which substantially affect society are primary tasks of criticism. Critics analyse present societal problems, understand the development of problems in their historical conditions and validate or invalidate its relevance in present society. Linking ideological criticism with rhetorical criticism, I investigate how The Arab Summit challenge socially developed narratives dictating Arab lives.

The Arab Summit as Organic Intellectuals

Intimidation created in the aftermath of September 11th 2001 motivated acute scrutiny of socio-political conduct in America. Assaults on people of colour persuaded attempts at becoming “white passing,” repressing ethnic identities. In academia, Salaita (2005) however argues, 9/11 strengthened the Arab presence. Condemning the act of terrorism, scholars vocalised against equal acts of terror committed against Arabs and Muslims around the world. During this time, cultural intellectuals remained absent, recognising the close proximity they maintain with society. As racial assaults continued to be dismissed as misdirected sentiments, xenophobia grew in America (Ahmad, 2004). Responding to growing hostility in the years after 9/11, Arab hip-hop artists established a reputation in the hip-hop community as well as politically. Without abandoning their Arab identity they upheld their American-ness. Addressing Arabophobia, Islamophobia, racial profiling of Arabs and Muslims, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and America’s fascist military operations around the world, Arab hip-hop evolved as Arab-conscious hip-hop.

Arab-conscious hip-hop is not different from the politically conscious hip-hop of the Raegan-Bush era. Arab-conscious hip-hop, it can be argued, is an undertaking to revive conscious hip-hop. Like African Americans did with hip-hop, Arab artists work towards spiritual uplift and community mobilisation (Hess, 2007). The element of consciousness in hip-hop, however, can be conceptualised through Freire’s (1973) notion of consciousness – *conscientization* – as reflection on reality, transforming an individual’s worldview, in order to transform the individual’s position in the world. Audiences of conscious hip-hop do not “have to already be self-conscious in order to struggle. By struggling I [we] become conscious/aware” (p. 46). Consciousness is awareness – it is self-reflection, self-construction and self-determination.

Consciousness initiates change by developing the ability to rethink and rewrite individual narratives. Informing listeners on societal complexities, conscious artists arouse listeners to struggle against hegemonic constructions of society. Specific to Arab-conscious hip-hop, Arab listeners contemplate on what their community has become and speculate on what their community could become. Arab-conscious hip-hop as a social influencer is characteristically pedagogical because it challenges societal essentialism.

Gershon argues, every musician, irrespective of their genre, is a public intellectual (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010). Gershon's argument has merit – because most musicians maintain a public life they are entrusted with intellectualism. Gershon defends his argument stating:

First, music is part of people's daily lives. It is a way of knowing that is understood both cognitively and affectively...Second, whether one is practicing alone or on stage in front of thousand, the act of making music is an inherently public act. Finally, music contains knowledge. The organised/emergent sounds that are music pass implicit and explicit idea to those who hear it. (p. 628)

Knowledge communicated through music enables audiences to understand their world (Ellsworth, 2005). Music creates an experience for the musician and the listener, from which neither can be withdrawn. That experience holds the potential to educate audiences on a myriad of topics.

Said (1996) contends that public life imposes intellectual responsibilities but Gramsci distinguishes between public (traditional) intellectuals and organic intellectuals. The departure between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals is that organic intellectuals exploit their position to advantage their community. In this section, I argue that in addition to the position organic intellectuals have in society, they are engaged in creating a politically conscious society while advocating for struggles by other marginalised groups. The Arab Summit, as musicians, exploit their

position, develop counter-hegemonic consciousness, address political mechanisms of society, represent the Arab community and assume the role of collective intellectuals to overcome segregation in society. In addition to excerpting interviews by the artists, I will analyse lyrics to advance my argument, because in lyrics are the evaluative intellectual elements. Due to the argument's structure I do not analyse lyrics chronologically nor do I analyse a song entirely at once.

Position of an Organic Intellectual

Chomsky believes *everyone* is capable of engaging against hegemony (Sandlin et al., 2010). Choosing not to engage hegemony, society brings “the truth about matters of human significance to an audience that can do something about them” (p. 576). Organic intellectuals exemplify such an audience, who are produced out of dominance to critically encounter societal anxieties. Their production is, at the same time, paradoxical because organic intellectuals balance between privilege and power and exclusion and marginalisation (Mahlomaholo & Netshandama, 2012). Organic intellectuals, consequently, exploit their unique position to develop tactics which challenge hegemony. Challenging hegemony is imperative because hegemony ensures domination. Hegemony normalises subordination without objection. The subordinated are, to an extent, unaware of their subordination. Making the subordinated aware of their position in society, organic intellectuals challenge hegemony because they challenge the normalised. Advocating for the advancement of marginalised into the mainstream, organic intellectuals challenge hegemonic practices in its ideological space. Nevertheless, developing counter-hegemony is not possible without a position in society, knowledge of power and an inclination towards pedagogical performance.

However, manipulation of their position requires an understanding of both sides – of domination and subordination.

Omar Offendum balances his identity as an Arab-American by declaring himself a “SyrianamericanA” (also the title of his first solo album) to normalise his adjective (and sometimes hyphenated) identity. The purpose is to separate and authenticate the Arab part and the American part of his identity. Through hip-hop, Omar Offendum enables his audience to authenticate their identities as well. Granted that the objective is to validate each part of his identity, at times one identity triumphs the other according to the situation. Omar Offendum commented:

...hip-hop has given me a platform to express myself and challenge these stereotypes very directly over the past 10 years. I think through the efforts of artists like myself, as well as authors, professors, journalists, bloggers and everyday people living their lives in a positive way these things will change. I am so proud of my Arab and Muslim roots. I don't feel the need to be apologetic about anything. I don't get sucked into having to deny that I'm a terrorist or extremist. To me it is more important to tell people what we are: beautiful, loving, intellectual, compassionate and proud people with a long history and a bright future Insha'Allah [God willingly]. (Dennaoui, 2011)

Omar Offendum's narrative, throughout his career, focused on being an “Arab”-American. There has always been a need for representation because American media repeatedly misrepresented the real Arab. Arab portrayals became increasingly polarised in the wake of 9/11, adding urgency to Omar Offendum's narrative. Since then he focuses on being identified as an “Arab”-“American.” Using hip-hop he communicates his reality to a diverse audience, urging them to think differently about Arabs as equal American citizens. As a result he challenges dominant understandings of Arabs, providing opportunities for audiences to develop counter-hegemonic understandings. Omar Offendum exploits his position as an artist to balance as well as represent his communities – the marginalised Arab and the privileged American. He acknowledged, “The position I'm in is one where I can use hip-hop as a platform to

bridge these two cultures that I identify with and raised me”³. Omar Offendum’s stress on his Arab-ness and American-ness is an attempt to balance his paradoxical position. As a bridge-builder, he initiates a dialogue to move Arabs from the subalterns to the mainstream. Though such a dialogue is counter-hegemonic it comes sans restrictions because it is channelled through an artistic expression which permits expressions inconceivable in other mediums. Hip-hop artists maintain the freedom to ask questions no one asks and answer questions no one answers. Despite the freedom, Omar Offendum uses the medium responsibly, challenging hegemony to bridge cultural gaps created.

The Narcicyst, similarly, bridges gaps of ignorance created by American media. The Narcicyst understands his potential through hip-hop and believes:

...because all societies that are under oppressive situations, or even being subjugated to racism or profiling or any form of oppression, have used hip-hop to facilitate their voice and be able to create a space for them to navigate in that the regular media, or the media that does engender people or racialise people, have no control over. It’s unedited. It’s straight from me to the listener. (Koudous, 2011)

Between The Narcicyst and his audience is hip-hop, making his music an unedited personal narrative. Similar to Omar Offendum, these narratives are counter-hegemonic because The Narcicyst attempts to challenge the dominant interpretations of an Arab’s identity with his experience as an Arab in the West. The Narcicyst’s performances, politically insensitive compared to other members of The Arab Summit, challenge the mainstream. Informing audiences on how they are subordinated, The Narcicyst exploits his position of privilege to engage listeners in a radical learning against hegemony.

³ “Interview with Omar Offendum” by JnJ503Productions:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCZRcrTJ2JQ>

As The Arab Summit, Excentrik, Omar Offendum, Ragtop and The Narcicyst collectively comment on politics concerning Arabs. As part of The Arab Summit, The Narcicyst accepted:

...it is our duty to use the many opportunities that we were lucky enough to access living in North America to use our voices...the fact that our people are being oppressed and are subjected to so many injustices...our experience is inextricably a reflection of [our community's stigmatisation] (Christoff, 2007)

Each member achieves a common purpose through hip-hop, i.e., to normalise the Arab being in America. In *Fear of an Arab Planet*, they channel four different struggles as Arabs in the West to reflect dynamic realities of the Arab community. Excentrik aptly cautions, "There are no absolutes in art, and nor should there be. Similarly, there are absolutely no absolutes in Arab identity and culture. Let this album stand to the myriad of clichéd, boxed-in and stereotypical offerings of the past" (Alsaman, 2010, p. 79). Their production challenges the Orientalist gaze through which Arabs continue to be conceived. Instead of the Arab identity being developed through a lens of an apathetic culture, The Arab Summit attempts to develop an identity which they believe reflects their community. While doing so they challenge dominant interpretations of an Arab while creating opportunities for the Arab community to move into the mainstream. Essentially, the exploitation of their position – as artists, as Westernised Arabs and as individuals between mainstream and subalterns – focuses on challenging the ideology which enables hegemonic constructions of Arabs. That ideology having being spread through popular culture makes it fitting that The Arab Summit attempts to reinforce a new popular in the same ideological space.

The Arab Summit's position in society demands engagement with audiences in a learning against ideological apparatuses. As prominent Arab voices in the

mainstream, they engage audiences in understanding hierarchical constructions of society. Their politically conscious music about prevailing ideology aims at developing a counter-hegemonic audience, who can then socially challenge the dominant. Exploitation of their position undoubtedly translates to developing counter-hegemonic consciousness; however that includes politicisation of their being, conscious representation and universal intellectualism, all of which demand engaging audiences in a critical pedagogy.

Developing Counter-hegemonic Consciousness

According to Landy (1994), “New meanings and new attitudes are in the process of being created alongside the old: change is constantly in the state of becoming just as dominant and traditional practices are constantly exerting their power” (p. 25). New ideas introduced should at the same time manifest a sense of consciousness, enabling audiences to enter a process of self-reflection. Said otherwise, resisting hegemony is limited in the scope of progress. Counter-hegemonic consciousness is instead needed for socio-political transformation. Critical consciousness should be pedagogical to truly transform society. Since hegemony and counter-hegemony exist within the same ideological space, they are cyclical in nature. Today’s counter-hegemony potentially is tomorrow’s hegemony. Societies are (probably) never going to be without ideologies, and therefore, hegemony will always be enacted. For this reason, organic intellectuals should create awareness with opportunities to resist stagnation in society. Whether they engage audiences in political positions against the elitist, or they introduce radical ideas through political incorrectness, the purpose is to breakdown society’s hierarchical construct and to move towards a socio-politically pluralistic society.

The Narcicyst gives voice to narratives the dominant culture suppresses. These narratives are counter-narratives aimed at challenging dominant messages about Arabs. With these counter-narratives The Narcicyst deconstructs the hegemonic Arab identity as an ideological myth. Consciousness spread through these narratives urges audiences to evaluate their complicity in power dynamics. The Narcicyst's criticalness asks audiences to avoid being objects of ideological conveniences. When subordination remains unchallenged, because hegemony seems natural, the dominated mindlessly inhabit the ideological space constructed by the dominant. Absence of opposition leads to headless existence making the dominated an object which can be persuaded or manipulated. The Narcicyst further explains:

And I think, you know, if you listen to my music, my message is mostly about individuality and the narcissist, narcissism and society and what's going on around us and just telling people, you know what – I'm aware of what's going on around me and I'm trying to be critical of both myself, my environment and where I come from and maybe we should all do the same...⁴

Noteworthy about the transfer of narratives into lyrics is that the narratives are essentially personal experiences. Excentrik on transferring experience to music explained:

Its [real life experiences] an intrinsic value in the music we create because of our interesting identity – Arab... The messages in the music are rarely deliberate, and that speaks volumes to the amount of thought these issues stimulate, they are perennial, unavoidable – even in subjective mediums. (Christoff, 2007)

The experiences The Arab Summit channels into their music are experiences unheard in popular media. Experiences reconstructed into lyrics attempts to invoke the listener's consciousness, because the lyrics are not deliberate constructions and the experiences are likely to be experienced by the listener. Without being intentionally counter-hegemonic, The Arab Summit challenge dominance.

⁴ "The Narcicyst" by SHOT BY JFK: <http://vimeo.com/14706605>

The same criticalness is evident in The Arab Summit's production. Of The Arab Summit, The Narcicyst writes:

Through The Arab Summit, we are attempting to "take it back" – in other words, to return to the original form of the music, in its political, social and figurative meaning to our specific cultural group, and more broadly, to the entire hip-hop community. (Alsalman, 2010, p. 18)

The Narcicyst's notion of "take it back" resonates deeply within hip-hop's history. Take it back signifies struggles by African Americans to change their identity from "niggers" to "niggas" (Kitwana, 2004). Niggers (and the word Negro) changed from racial epithets to words filled with historical emotion. Notwithstanding, nigga connotes a dynamic identity (Judy, 1994). The Narcicyst's take it back, in the same way, attempts to reclaim the Arab identity. The purpose is to categorise the Arab identity without controlling elements of society or bureaucracy (Prashad, 2000). Rather than Arab (or Ayrab) being a derogatory designation, The Arab Summit endeavour to change its meaning to signify a struggle in association with other struggles. At the same time, take it back proposes to revive politically conscious hip-hop. The commercialisation of hip-hop dismantled the political hip-hop movement. Despite being politically incorrect with the potential of mass mobilisation, hip-hop never aimed at influencing politics (politics here meaning the electoral system) (Bynoe, 2004). However, conscious hip-hop of the Reagan-Bush era threatened the ideologically constructed society. The Narcicyst's desire of taking it back, in the context of hip-hop, attempts to revive a politically conscious society. There is a sense of collectivism as The Arab Summit resolves on liberating hip-hop from commercialisation and superfluous appropriation. The Narcicyst's "take it back" appeals to marginalised narratives, not just Arabs'. That collectivism aims at awakening a politically unconscious society to marginalisation of various groups, but it begins by challenging the false consciousness in its ideological space.

In “Justice Tomorrow” Ragtop challenges hegemonic practices by condemning capitalism and consumerism, “Where your waste is they food, Shit that you’d throw away gets consumed with a little bit of regret, whole lotta not enough, Yet get your dollars anyway that you can.” Criticising how society is consumed by consumerism, Ragtop invites the listener to reflect on their complicity towards systems of oppression. Ragtop denounces societal structures and behaviours while without the dominant. Ragtop’s second verse further offers insight into media constructions, “When the subjects of this verse are referred to subjectively as bums and murderers, Media perverts the scale of the danger ‘til neighbour, All nervous eye each other like strangers or worse.” Ragtop presents the effects of media portrayals on those being viewed and those viewing. The verse again questions the listener’s complicity. Ragtop challenges the listener to avoid being an object of ideological convenience. Rather than being influenced by dominant constructions, be aware of them and challenge them. His first verse criticising capitalism and his second verse criticising media constructions are not necessarily deliberate attempts at counter-hegemony. Ragtop’s criticism is commonplace; however, they reveal the listener’s complicity towards such systems. Indeed, Ragtop aims at consciousness, but he does so through uncomplicated rap references. Audiences listening to “Justice Tomorrow” and Ragtop’s criticism will have to first understand their contribution towards hegemonic practices before they protest it. Counter-hegemonic consciousness is a process, which begins by learning how an individual contributes towards hegemony.

Omar Offendum’s verse from “Quasi-Islamic” is similar to Ragtop’s criticism, “Even when our brother from the gutter, Killing one another for the bread and butter – wow...it’s so foul, Yet I can’t help but think we should have seen it coming...like porn stars, All these warlords do is fuck us over for the money.” His verse is a critical

examination of Arabs' position in society. Unlike Ragtop, Omar Offendum specifically addresses the Arab community. Likening Arabs to porn stars, Omar Offendum presents the Arab community as racialized (contextual to sexualised) objects. Additionally, he holds Arabs culpable for their stigmatised designation in society. Omar Offendum, by rapping about Arabs' Otherness, urges the listener to become a self-determined subject rather an object to influence. His criticism, however, is not without purpose. Informing audiences about social structures and subsequent domination and subordination, Omar Offendum involves audiences in a pedagogical performance against society's hierarchical construction.

Such criticalness advocated by Ragtop and Omar Offendum as part of The Arab Summit is reflective of Hall's (1990) conception of identity – understanding what we really are rather than what we have become. The Narcicyst explains The Arab Summit's conception of the Arab identity:

Where exactly do we stand in the scheme of Arab being, and how have our forefathers shaped this experience into its present jumbled state? From our history of war to post-colonial studies on identity, Arab culture has been plagued by the constant intervention of outside forces and misrepresentation through public forms of media (No victim complex please). The culmination of our generational displacement finally reached a breaking point on September 11, 2001. As Hollywood vilified our existence and the news targeted our experience, many Eastern youth in the West latched on to the underground ways of life in order to subvert and externalise the experience of migrant identity formation. (Alsalman, 2010, p. 38)

The Arab Summit's reality as criticism communicated through music creates an epistemic function. It establishes a connection between the artist and the listener, enabling pedagogical reflection. Through hip-hop, audiences engage social practices, questioning their validity. Behaviour towards Arabs, specifically, is contemplated in light of new information made available by artists. Their lyrics being personal experiences introduce new messages and new meanings, enabling construction of a

new Arab. The Arab Summit's attempt at introducing a sense of counter-hegemonic consciousness aims at perceiving Arabs as equal members in society. However they choose to spread counter-hegemony, because of society's construction it will undoubtedly be political.

Being Political

Adeleke (2012) describes organic intellectuals as guerrilla intellectuals, who remain hidden from the oppressive systems they are embedded into while destroying it from within. As representatives of the marginalised in the mainstream, organic intellectuals produce counter-hegemony threatening the ideological space enacting hegemony without engaging the elitist. Such pursuits make organic intellectuals, according to Gramsci (1995), inherently political. Their political involvement is, however, not partisan politics. Organic intellectuals concern themselves with political mechanisms that perpetuate domination and subordination. Appropriating hip-hop, The Arab Summit embodies the dominant culture to oppose their subordination as Arabs. The Arab Summit, using hip-hop as their medium, politicise systems which discriminate Arabs in an attempt to disassemble the constructed societal power.

The Narcicyst, in particular, politicises his personal experiences:

...in the beginning my music was extremely political. And I wouldn't say "political" more than I would say "politicised." You know, it was very much dealing with direct issues that politics had – how politics had affected our lives on the daily level, be it through profiling at airports or, you know, just the stereotypes that are engendered through Hollywood film, through regular popular culture, even through hip-hop music that I listen to, and how that isn't helping, you know?
(Kouddous, 2011)

Everything that happens is political. From me not getting a job, to my cousin not getting a job because of his beard or whatever, to, you know, getting stared at in the store, to being at the border. All these things are political. These are experiences that bled into my music. I don't feel like there's time to waste, you know. It is important to be

able to use your art to facilitate dialogue or to create a voice for yourself.⁵

The Narcicyst describes situations commonplace to Arabs, despite being discriminatory. Addressing the discrimination, The Narcicyst expresses an Arab perspective. Politicising these situations to an audience he creates consciousness in society questioning society's conscience. Without consciousness political dissent is limited. At the same time, The Arab Summit's political consciousness does not affect politics, in terms of polling, and should never. Instead their politics awakens audiences to causes of social justice.

For The Narcicyst, "Hip-hop stands for highly intellectual people hovering over politics. That hyphen between the hip and the hop is the land that we walk on."⁶ Omar Offendum, similarly believes, by being political they "tell the stories that need to be told, educate about history and reach out to Arab Americans, especially the youth, and let them know that it's okay to be political and that they have something to be proud of" (Saville, 2012). Excentrik on The Arab Summit's political undertaking pointed out:

The project, be it as it may, is a perspective, a conjoining effort as Arabs with a different framework for change. Of course we could wave flags, scream, slogans, done the usual protest attire and art, for all intents and purposes, typical. But we haven't. And I can say with all rejoice and enthusiasm and that's not the case. (Alsaman, 2010, p. 77)

The Arab Summit could protest in typical ways; instead they politicised their production. The Arab Summit understands the influence of cultural politics and *Fear of an Arab Planet* is a responsible attempt at politicising Arabs' racial identity, their Eastern culture, social statuses and their duality as Westernised Arabs in the West.

Their music reflects their disposition which inclines them to Arab movements. They

⁵ "The Narcicyst" by SHOT BY JFK: <http://vimeo.com/14706605>

⁶ "TEDxDubai 2010| Narcicyst | Who We Are, When We Were-Identity In Flux" by TEDx Talks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Libf3KYeCZ8>

address politics concerning Arabs in a fashion that is not limited to dissent. Beyond their political position is an attempt to elevate society's consciousness.

"We Need Order" by The Arab Summit is a sanguineous track castigating Arab politics. The Narcicyst begins by criticising Arabs and external intervention for the current situation in the Arab world, "Them Arabs at it again, Harab [war] on the menu, Thareb [hit] on the gavel, We in!" The Narcicyst, with his verse, highlights the extent to which war is part of an Arab's lived experience. Violence and death are usual sights for Arabs that there is "war served on menus." The Narcicyst further raps:

Assassination assertive, a fascination with murder
The past erased and unheard of, we trapped in ancient disorder
Blasting flames of a mortar attack that came in the morning
All hard to ignore like the pain of lacking a name for his coffin

"The past unheard of" alludes to Arabs' glorious history. Secretariat violence has left the Arab world to reminisce about the past because they are stuck in times ("ancient disorder") hindering their society's progress. With "Blasting flames of a mortar attack that came in the morning, All hard to ignore like the pain of lacking a name for his coffin," The Narcicyst laments that wars continue to prove Arab lives are cheap. The absence of order produced by an unjust socioeconomic order condemns Arabs and treats their sufferings as inevitable and unavoidable. These verses, again, are not deliberate, because The Narcicyst describes "ordinary" situations in the Arab world. However, The Narcicyst essentially attempts to replace the narrative of disorder. Though The Narcicyst implicates Arabs for their current situation, he attacks media constructions of the situation. His war driven description is the mainstream composition of the Arab world. The Narcicyst challenges that mainstream composition with the mainstream Arab perspective. Instead of media narrating the Arab experience, The Narcicyst as an Arab narrates the Arab experience. He attempts

to claim control over his own narrative. Despite political disorders, it is Arabs' responsibility to reorder themselves.

Omar Offendum's verse following *The Narcicyst's* gives the listener hope. He raps, "Now let me show 'em how the Arab Summit up, Hung up on war, Wanna erupt, We're torn, Wanna give up, But forfeiting's for chumps, It's more fitting to force a formidable thump." Omar Offendum continues from *The Narcicyst's* verse. Demanding an Arab reorder, Omar Offendum's verse develops positivity – a reorder is not a lost cause. He further raps, "There's no time to evolve when old-timers are caught, In Osama mirages, Your barometer's off, Check the pressure and gauge us." "Osama mirages" does not allude to Islamist terrorism; instead to a sense of conservatism that is part of al-Qaeda's ideology. Conservatism in the Middle East is, however, not the sole product of religion. Post-colonial experiences and a tendency to avoid being like the coloniser has greatly contributed (Akyol, 2011). Omar Offendum accepts that Arabs' shortcomings have created their present failures. He challenges the conservatism and the generations before claiming the present generation are better capable. Finally, Omar concludes, "Prayed the rain would soon come but first for something we need..." Omar Offendum is hopeful for change in the Arab world but he understands that first, there needs to be order. Though Omar Offendum's verse is positive compared to *The Narcicyst's*, they both attempt to achieve a similar purpose. Discussing politics through hip-hop they normalise the conversation. As *The Narcicyst* suggested, they politicise common Arab situations, for the purpose Omar Offendum suggested, to gain the listener's attention. "We Need Order" and other political tracks attempt to involve audiences in everyday politics which influence their lives.

Similarly, in “Justice Tomorrow,” The Narcicyst involves audiences in politics while presenting the Arab perspective on the colonisation of Palestine. The nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict favoured towards Israel with media bias trivialises the Palestinian account. Addressing the conflict The Narcicyst raps, “Forced to write to the cost of life, plus tax Arab fuck that! Kharab a’arith al-deen [spoil your religion], thareb maridh [hit the sick (and)] they running!” “Cost of life plus tax” refers to loss of Palestinian lives during the conflict. The Narcicyst calls upon memories of those who have died over the years. “Thareb maridh they running” does not refer to Israel alone; it incriminates Palestinian militants who attack Israelis. Implicating Palestinians for the failure to achieve peace, The Narcicyst proposes that both Palestinians and Israelis prevent a peaceful conclusion. The Narcicyst’s verse is not different from media bias, blaming Palestinians for the violence. Nevertheless, it is an Arab perspective of the conflict. The Narcicyst does not balance the coverage but he inserts an Arab narrative into the conflict. By blaming Palestinians for the failure to achieve peace, The Narcicyst challenges the Arab perspective of the conflict as well. He normalises the discussion and presents an artistic view of the conflict. Eventually though, The Narcicyst’s contributes Arab narrative to the conflict and informs listeners on a profoundly politicised issue.

Ragtop’s verse in “Justice Tomorrow” involves the listener in political consciousness. He raps, “No justice, so get up, stand up, clap your damn hands do whatever you can to just speak out, Seek out the secrets that leak out, even though don’t wanna speak ‘bout, there ain’t no.” Ragtop’s provocative call for action is a call for a cultural revolution. “The secrets that leak out,” is a likely allusion to WikiLeaks. Ragtop’s reference to WikiLeaks gives direction to a revolution against dominance. He urges the listener to be conscious of systems that fails to address needs of the

society. Opposing dominance similarly, The Narcicyst in “Somebody Please” raps, “Let your heart split fire, blaze quick! Artificial fertiliser, we ain’t shit. What will it take to realise, we taint with displacement, straying from enslavement, tape this!” This verse urges listeners to realise the extent of their subordination. The Arab Summit, with stimulating lyrics against a system of domination, takes advantage of their position to audiences’ political consciousness. Ragtop and The Narcicyst, specifically, call for engagement with the dominant. The political inclination of The Arab Summit involves their listeners in a radical learning.

Representation of their Group

Gramsci humorously notes, just because “everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear in a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or a tailor” (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 1996, p. 9). Similarly, because an Arab is a public figure, the individual is not necessarily representing the Arab community. Of course, as an Arab there is a level of representation; organic intellectuals, however, represent their social group consciously. Organic intellectuals are pertinent representatives because they have valued experience of the mainstream and the subalterns (Simon, 2013). Their experience enables communication between social hierarchies. Despite organic intellectuals’ position between marginalisation and privilege, they are not mere representatives of the subordinated in the mainstream. Organic intellectuals are not token personas who reinforce hegemony; nor are they proponents of happy concordance advocating for the inclusion of the subordinated in the mainstream. According to West (1999), organic intellectuals (or his organic catalysts) representation creates acceptance not tolerance. Representation in the mainstream should create a multicultural society that is not hegemonic or concordant. Once

multiculturalism is established, the established does not become the norm. There remains scope for integration and further pluralism. Therefore, representation, in accordance with West, is not advocacy for inclusion or tokenism. Instead it is a collective attempt by subjugated to challenge heterogeneity and homogeneity for individuality.

As a representative of the Arab community, Omar Offendum uses hip-hop as his message. Hip-hop if viewed as an entity maintains the same perplexing position as organic intellectuals – a mainstream medium started from desperation for progress. As an Arab-American hip-hop artist, Omar Offendum highlights the complicated nature of his identity, medium and message. He explained:

And it's always the medium is the message too. In the sense that, I'm on stage doing what I am doing as a, you know, young, confident, Arab, Muslim male and rapping in this language that they understand and relate to, and this art form that they can relate to. And that in itself is a message.⁷

In its beginnings, hip-hop artists channelled through it messages of independence. As hip-hop permeated through different struggles, the same messages spread, making hip-hop as a medium inseparable from its message of liberation. The medium and the message interplay in hip-hop communicate self-determination in different ways.

Using hip-hop as the medium *and* the message, Omar Offendum performs his roles – a Muslim Arab (-American) – to an audience to redeem his Arab and/or Muslim being from controlling narratives. The performativity of identities, through hip-hop, creates layers of representation as Arabs, Americans, Canadian, Iraqis, Muslims, Palestinians, Syrians and Westerners.

⁷ “Arab American Stories – Omar Offendum” by Detroit Public TV:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuAJs0e4Swk>

The artists additionally have the responsibility of harmonising their Eastern identity with their Western identity. On the hyphenated identity Excentrik writes:

We have essentially existed within political and cultural duality, namely, a hyphenated existence as “Arab-Americans.”

-The Arab: Undoubtedly and understandably angry. We are constantly frustrated with the wars on Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and Somalia; inaction and misguided blame in regards to Sudan’s bloody civil war; and add an endless list of dictators the US supports in our region...Plenty of potential for a forceful demand for change.

-The American – Feeling perpetually voiceless and constantly bombarded with the corporate media’s portrayal of our community (hello! I am a “terrorist”); the Department of Homeland Security and it’s racial profiling status quo; police brutality and the lack of any real face of representation in our respective communities on any level higher than the local grassroots are all contributors to the necessity for us, as Arabs in America, to pull closer to homeland (i.e. the Arab-world).

However, it is exactly that American desire to assimilate all peoples of “foreign” and hyphenate all identities “western” that Arab Summit has thrived within. (Alsalman, 2010, p. 78-79, paragraph breaks as in original text)

Hyphenated identities are characteristic of Diasporas. The hyphenation is the divide and the connection between “homelands.” It creates an adjective identity, alienating members of Diasporas from their dwelling and their origin. Specific to The Arab Summit, and the diasporic experience they maintain, they are too western for the East and too eastern for the West. On *Fear of an Arab Planet*, they celebrate their lack of belonging and their hyphenated identities as Arab-Americans and an Arab-Canadian. Through “Quasi-Islamic” they explore the uniqueness of hyphenation; yet at the same time, despite “Quasi-Islamic” recognising the Arab diaspora, it verbalises a typical diasporic narrative, not restricted to Arabs.

Omar Offendum in “Quasi-Islamic” illustrates the geographic distribution of the Arab diaspora:

When you say “back home” that could mean a bunch of different things

KSA born, USA raised, soory [Arabic word for Syria] reppin' DC
 settling on the west coast of the west now
 Tupac knows I can get around like the west Nile
 Spread fast with my head wrapped in the illest textiles
 Steadfast on the silk road from Damascus up to Romaa
 Live in the middle of little Armenia eating my dolmaa
 Mini Vietnam sand niggaz know my heart pumps that red
 Lebanese Palestinian greater Syrians type thread
 That binds us all together now
 From Baghdad to the river Nile/
 But I know a sunny day will shine over that homeland of mine
 Oases where J.C.'s & Mohammeds dined.
 Mayor Barry smoked crack & Arnold pumped his iron
 With a couple of rhymes I'm about a nine
 From that homeland in my mind.

While embracing his American-ness, Omar Offendum's attachment to his Arab heritage is evident. Though being an Arab in the West is challenging, he emphasises the privileged life it is, in comparison to Arabs in the Arab world. Omar Offendum eventually desires the unification of the Arab diaspora but it is not to return to their place of origin. Instead, it is to create their Arab-ness in their space of attachment. In the West, Arabs might already be national citizens, however, Omar Offendum seeks acceptance as cultural citizens. He puts forth, through his verses, the Arabs' contribution in the development of the West, in particular his West – The United States of America.

As a member of a diaspora, Excentrik commented, “[Generally] I would say our music definitely expresses that experience [of being in diaspora], because we [The Arab Summit] are the product of that experience and have that perspective, which how we frame our music...to sort of encapsulate the Arab diaspora youth experience (Christoff, 2007).” As part of The Arab Summit and a member of a diaspora, Omar Offendum counters essentialism of national identity. His social mediation through “Quasi Islamic” translates the diasporic experience of detachment into attachment. It should be noted though, despite representing the Arab diaspora as individuals and

through their work, The Arab Summit embodies a general diasporic narrative. Contexts of each community vary but The Arab Summit creates an appeal through the same ordeal of being strangers in their “own country.” Members of Diasporas do not display nationalistic tendencies, especially towards their place of origin. However, their patriotism towards their place of dwelling becomes questionable when subjugated (Gabriel, 2011). The Arab Summit’s treatment of being in diaspora creates a new meaning of “homeland” which other diasporic communities (or communities subordinated due to their lack of belonging) can relate to, initiating a sense of collectivism among the marginalised. The meaning challenges norms of identity. It introduces dynamic representations of their country (America and Canada) and opposes hegemony of colour, ethnicity and race.

Collective Intellectualism

Since Gramsci’s theorization of organic intellectuals, societies have become increasingly homogeneous. In a homogeneous society, West’s (1999) critical organic catalyst is functional in comparison to Gramsci’s organic intellectual. Writing in context of a racialized America, West addresses Gramsci’s concern of mainstream representation introducing the concept of collective intellectualism. Organic intellectuals, or critical organic catalysts according to West, influence their struggles with other struggles. Struggles by marginalised groups inform each other, influence each other and highlight each other’s passage to progress; especially in the case of hip-hop. Black hip-hop movements resistance against institutional discrimination inspires numerous hip-hop movements to follow the same path towards social justice. Organic intellectuals remain associated with their social group without being confined by their actions. Organic intellectuals do not actively advocate for all marginalised

groups, rather they stand sympathetic towards them (Simon, 2013). That sympathy manifests action. Advancing interests of a specific marginalised group, organic intellectuals enable a collective movement of the subjugated. With respect to hip-hop, such collectivism began with Black and Puerto Rican hip-hop artists and shortly influenced other communities within and outside America. Hip-hop, today, is a worldwide movement, seldom physically unified (like The Arab Summit) yet intellectually allied against oppressive systems. Advocating for a specific group, organic intellectuals designate consciousness meaning among the subordinated with the purpose of elevating the subordinated group's position in society. West (1990) describes this demand for action as overcoming segregation, mental not physical, which is what organic intellectuals of the current period should focus on.

As a Syrian, Omar Offendum's identity becomes the focal point of his advocacy for Syria. On the contrary, Omar Offendum believes in issues beyond affiliations. He conveys his messages sans his Arab, Syrian and American identity, "I believe in this issue [Syrian civil war], not just because I am Syrian, not just because I am Arab and not just because I am Muslim. I am a human being who believes in human rights and equality for all – full stop" (Dennaoui, 2012). Performing as a "human being" creates a human appeal across communities. According to Omar Offendum, "Resistance to oppression, representing the universal struggle for human rights and dignity; these are ideas and themes that often permeate my lyrics and songs" (Dennaoui, 2011). The Narcicyst is similarly benevolent:

...how can you turn that, you know that message into the medium and medium into the message, sort of, you know? How do you use that in a way where people who don't care or people who don't want to hear about our experience, how can you translate that into something that's palatable and personalising the, quote-unquote, struggles of my personal struggle, and how that relates to somebody's struggle in Brooklyn or somebody's struggle in, you know, Los Angeles or somebody's struggle in Denmark, or you know, so – because at the end

of the day we're all human beings, and if you strip all these layers of conditioning that are put onto our identity then you realise that, at the end of the day, we're all fighting the same battle, which is against a destructive system of economic and political repression. (Kouddous, 2011)

Hip-hop carries messages of brotherhood, in addition to messages of liberation.

Whenever hip-hop is appropriated, it acts as a grassroots organiser (Malone & Martinez Jr, 2010). Hip-hop's culture itself unites struggling communities through the arts, i.e., emceeing, dancing graffiti and rapping. Despite hip-hop's growth, it remains undoubtedly rooted in the Black community. Therefore, whenever a community appropriates hip-hop, it appropriates the Black struggle, establishing a connection with the community. The same sense of worldliness is transferred into *Fear of an Arab Planet*. The Arab Summit unifies struggles without attempting to equal them. The Arab Summit addresses Arab concerns, which foreground their music, but in the process they establish connections with people of colour to unify the marginalised.

Appropriating hip-hop, The Arab Summit prudently acknowledges struggles of the Black community. In "Last Days" Ragtop raps, "Widespread looting, time to cop a gun, shoot ém, Ain't no PAC left, Malcolm X, speaking for the movement. Ain't no pride left, kill or die, why because we human, ain't no family, damn it's just me - & my confusion." Ragtop's reference to Malcolm X is common to Arab hip-hop. Several Arab artists frequently call upon memories of African American leaders. Their salutation establishes connections with African Americans and informs the Arab struggle. Allusions and connections, like Ragtop makes, form alliances among racialized communities. Ragtop recognises their leaders are now of the past and the responsibility of intellectualism is now upon members of the community. His last line in particular, "damn it's just me - & my confusion," is a hopeful cry for unification despite being grim. Ragtop presents the mental and physical alienation among people

of colour with the hope that such estrangement among racialized communities reduces.

Excentrik in “Justice Tomorrow,” further exemplifies attempts to unify people of colour. He raps, “Whether you an immigrant, Or children of slaves, You can see it in the difference of the living in conditions, Like missions tortured Indians force ‘em to Christians, We call ‘em Palest-Indians we ain’t missing.” Excentrik refers to Native Indians’ forceful conversion to Christianity but there is a deeper meaning in calling them Palest-Indians. Using religion, Zionists claim ascendancy over Palestine and though not similarly, the Pilgrims claimed superiority with Christianity to displace Native Indians from their lands. Excentrik establishes a connection with struggles – through claims of land, a place in history and general class struggles. Excentrik extends the Arab struggle to immigrants, unfortunate products of slavery and Native Indians. Excentrik ends with a call for collective power against hegemonic dominance. He reminds the listener that consolidated power enables domination over the weak. Excentrik’s purpose to unify people of colour is to reverse the power of balance. Excentrik’s sense of collectivism attempts to change the power of balance and thereby change Arabs’ and other groups’ subordination.

While The Arab Summit attempts to unify people of colour, their identity as Westernised Arabs urges them to address the Arab world versus the West conflict. In order to overcome the clash of civilisations, The Arab Summit alludes to Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – to assuage growing hostility between the East and the West. Oftentimes religion propagates ideological violence – Arabs are thought to be anti-Christianity while the West is thought to be anti-Islam. Judaism, Christianity and Islam find their origins in the Middle East and that advances The Arab Summit’s appeal for harmony. Using religious references, The Arab Summit

attempts to overcome the divide between communities and constitute a new ideology in society. “Quasi-Islamic” (or “The Guide”) demonstrates such employment of religion. In “Quasi-Islamic,” The Arab Summit reveal the interconnectedness among Abrahamic faiths through the chorus, “Believing in God, We breathe in the lah, A seasonal guide and reason to rhyme, My people subscribe or just leave it behind, Give it back fam, damn – I might wanna read it sometime.” ““The” Lah” translates to “Al”-lah in Arabic. The Christian West believes in “God” and Allah translates to “The God” which is the same concept of God across Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, when Arab Christians offer prayers in Arabic they refer to God as Allah. The interplay between Allah and God indicates that language and ignorance essentially separates the East from the West. The Narcicyst and Omar Offendum, in “Quasi-Islamic,” act as “guides” (hence the alternative title) throughout the song, but in the chorus, God/religion is the guide to unify the divide. The Narcicyst and Omar Offendum, once again, do not ignore the complicity of Arabs and Muslims in the discord. The Narcicyst and Omar Offendum accept their contribution towards the divide and propose a path to peace through religion. The last lines of the chorus urge coreligionists to follow religion as it is intended.

Within the Arab versus the West conflict, over the years, religion has exacerbated the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conflict that was once between Arabs and Jews (where Jews are thought of as a race) is now fought between Muslims and Jews. In “Justice Tomorrow,” The Narcicyst directs his verse at Zionist Jews – “Life that kill death, divisive ill step to heaven like *isra al-mi’raj* and this talk will dislodge the sick knowledge minaret, dishonest spite to the plight of an immigrant entitled to live again.” With his verse, The Narcicyst attempts at collectivism through religion. *Isra al-mi’raj* refers to Quran readings, when the Prophet travelled from Mecca to al-

Aqsa Mosque (in Jerusalem) then to heaven and back. Today al-Aqsa Mosque is among the few places in Palestine without restricted access. In fact, al-Aqsa mosque sits atop Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism. The Narcicyst believes that unification through religion can conclude the conflict and bring peace to a land considered holy by both. “Life that kill death” addresses the Zionists, referring to Jewish *Aliyah*. At the same time it resonates with a chant of the *Intifada* – “resistance is existence.” “Entitled to live again” reminds Zionists of refuge they found in historic Palestine. The Narcicyst asks Zionist Jews to realise their ancestors faced the same fate as what they make the Palestinians go through. The Arab Summit extends their collectivism to Zionist Jews calling for unification in the name of religion and historic struggles.

Discrimination Arabs face in America includes discrimination by various ethnic groups despite those groups’ marginalisation, making collective intellectualism increasingly difficult. Associating struggles and the influence of religion target the ideological barriers between communities, which is what West advocated for – mental divide not physical. Reinterpreting ideologies, The Arab Summit engages audiences in pedagogy against self-imposed mental apartheid. Collective intellectualism, though, is impossible without multiple engagements in society, whether active or passive. At the same time, collective intellectualism is severely limited through music because music lacks relatability across varied audiences. The Arab Summit’s production itself is authenticated with Arab influence in the context, lyrics (though predominantly English, it is influenced by Arabic) and sound (instruments, sampling and singing styles). Such authenticity reduces the appeal across different groups. Nonetheless, collaborations can attract audiences to different messages. For example, “#Jan25” by Omar Offendum and The Narcicyst, dedicated to the Egyptian civil

revolution, features Freeway, a prominent Black conscious artist. Freeway's inclusion introduces his audience in solidarity with the Egyptians. *Fear of an Arab Planet* does not include any collaboration tracks, but Arab organic intellectualism is not limited to this single album. Albeit collective intellectualism is limited through music, collectivism can still be achieved with the position of an organic intellectual. At present stage, though, collectivism among racialized communities is uncommon, which makes theorising collective intellectualism problematic.

Reconsidering Gershon's (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010) argument of all musicians being public intellectuals, said differently, all musicians are consciously engaged in society. Of course, some artists are seldom concerned with cultural politics. Just because musicians maintain a public life they are bestowed with the responsibility of intellectualism. If musicians fail to use their position to advance their community, as Gramsci argues, they are traditional intellectuals. Organic intellectuals involve themselves in political representation of their social group and collectivism with the dominated. However, political representation and collectivism are not primary undertakings. Exploitation of privilege for advancement of society, developing counter-hegemonic consciousness, awakening the politically unconscious, representation of a social group and collective intellectualism contributes to a radical learning. Organic intellectuals exploit their position to intersect power relations and politics in the context of culture and involve themselves in pedagogy of the masses. While they are inclined to Arab movements, Excentrik, Omar Offendum, Ragtop and The Narcicyst do not isolate other audiences. The Arab Summit's music addresses collectivism required for today's society; and while being Arabs in the West they also acknowledge their roles as people of colour and people in diaspora. However, these artists essentially perform public pedagogy. Whether it is Gramsci's conception of an

organic intellectual or West's conception of critical organic catalyst, there is an inseparable pedagogical element.

Organic Pedagogy

Power constructs society in relation to ideology, making the dominated an object of convenience. Pedagogy in a power dominated society, therefore, should embody the interplay between fact and fiction. Public pedagogy should focus on confronting social myths and interpretations alike. Gramsci, like Freire, Hall, Said, Giroux and West did years later, advocated for the dispersion of a relational knowledge which engages society in conscious self-development. Public pedagogy should create opportunities for communities to rethink and rewrite themselves in the context of history, present and future. Within discourses of historical significance, public pedagogy challenges present practices and develops strategies to challenge hegemony. Instead of focusing on classrooms, Hall (1992) urges intellectuals to occupy non-traditional sites for pedagogy. The purpose is to challenge prevailing hegemony from its inception without actively engaging the elite. Engaging non-traditional sites in a progressive education, pedagogues interact with the dominant in same the ideological space within which dominance is enacted. For Hall (1996), public pedagogy questions identity and identification in the context of difference and belonging.

Hip-hop, as a site for public pedagogy, engages audiences in discursive manners, developing new ways to think of one's position in society. Though contemporary hip-hop concedes to elitist tendencies, conscious hip-hop and learning through political performances holds the potential for resistance. Conscious hip-hop serves an epistemological function, particularly in relation to knowledge regarding

racism, identity, social progress and more. Listening to hip-hop, and messages and meanings communicated through it, knowledge becomes culturally available (Price, 1987). Hip-hop shapes rappers' and their listeners' political orientations (Sandlin et al., 2010). Public pedagogy highlights “performative aspects of how people enact their identities and a performance designed to ignite political and social consciousness in the public realm” (p. 506). Hip-hop engages audiences as co-creators. Said otherwise, when rap verses are practiced and repeated, listeners who begin as consumers of a form of knowledge become co-producers of the same knowledge. Such pedagogy is performative, engaging experiences as interactions between texts and audiences. As a site for popular engagement, hip-hop enables construction of identities.

Arguing for organic pedagogy, I propose the core function of an organic intellectual as public pedagogy. The political nature of The Arab Summit's production immerses audiences in radical learnings. Whether The Arab Summit engages in political consciousness or Arab representation, they involve themselves in public pedagogy. The Arab Summit's music and accompanying elements showcases their pedagogy. As pedagogues, The Arab Summit critically engages audiences in deconstructing the popular Arab. Performative pedagogy is, more often than not, deliberate because pedagogues condition learners to recollect previous learnings before challenging those learnings. Their music informs listeners on the interaction of their ideologies and social practices. Consciousness communicated through their songs enables the realisation of how power and ideology influence knowledge, social relations and identities. The Arab Summit's pedagogy informs audiences of an alternate reality.

The Arab Summit, on *Fear of an Arab Planet*, combine intricate references in lyrics with complex layering and sampling to engage politically unconscious audiences in new learnings. “Justice Tomorrow” exemplifies performative pedagogy with its sampling and progression of verses. “Justice Tomorrow” begins with a sample from Fairuz’s “زهرة المدائن” (Flower among Cities), an ode to Jerusalem:

لاجلك يا مدينة الصلاة اصلي
For you the city of prayer, I pray
لاجلك يا بهية المساكن يا زهرة المدائن
For you, with splendid houses, my flower in the valley
يا قدس يا قدس يا قدس يا قدس
Oh! Jerusalem, Oh! Jerusalem, Oh! Jerusalem
يا مدينة الصلاة اصلي
Oh city of prayer, I pray for you

As Fairuz’s sample ends, the crackling of a helicopter beats the air into submission, setting the mood for the song. The composition of “Justice Tomorrow” inures a listener to typical messages regarding Palestine and then challenges a listener’s inclination. Fairuz’s sample in memory of Palestine and chants against Israel in the background gives an impression “Justice Tomorrow” is dedicated to Palestine; and if not, denies Israel’s existence. However, the song does neither. Ragtop and Excentrik concern themselves with struggles around the world and The Narcicyst attempts to bridge the divide between Zionists and Palestinians making “Justice Tomorrow” an anthem against discriminating systems. “Justice Tomorrow” informs audiences about unheard narratives. Regardless of The Arab Summit’s ability to change marginalisation, they engage the popular for the purpose of social transformation.

“Quasi-Islamic,” like “Justice Tomorrow,” challenges dominant messages and interpretations about Arabs. In an attempt to condition listeners to typical messages about Arabs, “Quasi-Islamic” is comparably explicit. The track begins with a mocking announcement:

How you do it as Jamal Abdul

The season guide to being Arab, and Muslim in the West
Volume One, Buy Now
Ever felt like your beard stank?
Have you ever felt like your hijab was frumpy?
Bet you never felt this Arab
Subscribe Now

Jamal Abdul is The Narcicyst's alter-ego and an archetypical Arab/Muslim name. The mocking introduction is a Westernised perception of an Arab – Muslim with a beard or a hijab. The Western construct of Arabs are often Islamic creating immediate connections to swarthy men with beards and submissive women in hijabs. Verses following the announcement by The Narcicyst and Omar Offendum guide the listener on being Arab beyond being Muslim. “Quasi-Islamic” attempts to present Arab-ness as consubstantial to any other identity, most importantly to American-ness. The Narcicyst and Omar Offendum question the listener whether their difference is socially and historically specific. Without addressing the question, they challenge their Otherness by celebrating their difference. The Arab Summit's politics of identity does not intend to eliminate difference for similarities. Politicisation of the Arab identity instead focuses on proving their position as equal citizens with differences; difference which Arabs will negotiate themselves and not mainstream constructions of Arabs. The impact of such conversations through music is profound because such conversations engage listeners in the same ideological space that denigrates Arabs. When popular messages are altered through performances, listeners embark on self-reflection as they distinguish fact from fiction. Most significantly, listeners' self-reflection becomes self-determination as they comprehend possibilities of other realities. The Arab Summit urge audiences to avoid looking at Arabs through lenses created for ideological purposes. The politically inclined popular Arab has been constructed to advance ideological propaganda. The Arab Summit recognises the indoctrination and politicises their identity advancing an Arab propaganda.

Alongside rap references and sampling, the construction of *Fear of an Arab Planet* demands for its contributions to a listener's experience. *Fear of an Arab Planet* is structured like a classic hip-hop recording with intros, interludes and outros creating opportunities to contribute to the listener's learning experience. The intro and outro especially, taken from a Hollywood movie, weaves all elements of *Fear of an Arab Planet* together. The interludes are interviews in Arabic discussing Saddam Hussein's atrocities, and instrumentals – one by Excentrik which he wrote when detained at an Israeli checkpoint. The Narcicyst explains how these elements contribute to a pedagogical experience:

In my search for Hollywood's misrepresentative quotes, I came across an obscure film starring Sean Connery called *The Arab Conspiracy*...At first glance, I thought the film was about the conspiracy against Arabs by Western forces. Through the many quotes I extracted as interludes for the Arab Summit album, I found that this film was actually about the internal Arab feuds that have prevented our nations from moving as one entity...The premise of the film is a rebellious Arab leader confronting his brethren and falling in love with the beautiful blonde lady – in other words, backstabbing his people and falling in love with the quintessential serene image of the West. This movie was the perfect representation of what the Arab Summit [referring to the political Arab Summit] was. Sean Connery represented our internal strife with Arab leadership and our reluctance to accept our fate to be free of nationalist belonging. Without this film, the film and overall cohesiveness of the album's chosen songs would have been dry and interleaved as separate experiences without a binding stream of consciousness. (Alsalman, 2010, p. 41-42)

A listener does not necessarily make the connections as The Narcicyst intends. However, the restructuring of dialogues and placement before and after relevant tracks creates a conversation with the listener. That conversation, as The Narcicyst explains, converses with the listener about failed leaderships and Arab shortcomings. In addition to the intro, interlude and outro, the samplings contribute towards pedagogically consciousness. The American songs used as samples belong to the period of time when African Americans

were culturally claiming their place in American society; for example “We Need Order” by Chi Lites and “Ain’t No Justice” by The Temptations. Noteworthy, *Fear of an Arab Planet* is a contextualised remake of Public Enemy’s *Fear of a Black Planet* from the golden age of hip-hop. Public Enemy castigated racism and White supremacy. The Arab Summit changed the context but not the purpose.

As organic intellectuals, The Arab Summit exploits their position engaging audiences in a radical learning. They do not necessarily advocate for a new social order as much as for a transformed social order which advances the marginalised from the subalterns. They embrace their difference in being Arabs but object their Otherness. They urge audiences to think differently, or at least think for themselves, about Arab identity.

Arab Intellectualism and the Future

Representation should not be viewed as mainstream inclusion. Instead, representation should focus on creating a culturally vibrant society which accepts difference as part of democracy and individuality. Difference, irrespective of any condition, should avert separatism and identity negotiations. Difference in the mainstream expresses pluralism towards a post-racial society. Representing difference develops articulations for social justice because post-racialism requisites social justice. Identity politics and representation therein advances subordinated groups towards justice. Communities' organic intellectuals involved in representing difference, at the same time, are not singular groups or individuals striving towards homology. Organic intellectuals are not always connected to each other – geographically or personally. In the context of Arabs, The Arab Summit is definitely not the sole representation of the Arab community. Within the popular realm, several contribute towards better Arab representation through art, comedy, movies and various music genres. Noticeable are contributions in the non-popular realm, additionally, through academia and literary works. Such progressions are germinal in attempts to control Arab narratives. Such contributions manifest intellectualism in different ways by adapting to criteria discussed in previous sections.

The Arab Summit satisfies primary criteria of organic intellectualism, i.e., exploitation of their position to the advantage of Arabs. As artists with racialized backgrounds, The Arab Summit confidently challenges society's prevalent ideology dictating Arab lives through their political engagements. Their political assertions are limited, however. Awakening the politically unconscious through hip-hop is severely restricted because the audience is limited by their ability to realise the alternative. Nonetheless, underestimating masses potential to rise against systems of oppression is

erroneous; but at present stage, assuming Arab-conscious hip-hop holds potential to dismantle social hierarchies, bearing in mind the genres nativity, is an idealist outlook. Laclau (1990) posits, social existence determines consciousness but contrary to Laclau I argue, consciousness is primary. Social existence, simultaneously though, creates conditions for socio-political progress. Consciousness initiates conversations about Arabs as equal citizens, or at least as fellow human beings. Consciousness coupled with social existence will lead to socio-political transformation which will enable self-determination among subjugated populations. Socio-political transformation, as I argue with organic pedagogy, requires public engagement in a progressive education.

Education preconditions social progress; nonetheless, education should not be limited to schools because classrooms are not the most influential sites for education. Classrooms reinforce hegemony, offering limited space for cultural protests (Sandlin et al., 2010). Ghareeb's (1983) research confirms classrooms' hegemonic tendencies with evidence of American school textbooks disseminating detrimental misinformation about Arabs. Curriculum reinforcing hegemony, however, resonates with Gramsci's pronouncement that "every relationship of "hegemony" is necessarily an educational relationship" (Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 350). Since classrooms provide limited space for cultural revolutions, popular sites supplement schools for the purpose of education, where despite the popular being ideologically driven provides opportunities for resistance (Fiske, 2010). Altering messages in popular sites, a transformative progress begins which challenges dominant messages. Specifically to the nature of hip-hop, an artist's experiences expressed through lyrics, which otherwise goes unheard, channels a new mode of thinking for the audience – resentment or action. Through pedagogical performances, artists establish a new

ideological space in which dominant narratives are countered. The purpose of public pedagogy, like classroom education was intended for, is to create a “radically interdisciplinary and contextualised sensibility” (Sandlin et al., 2010, p. 3).

Occupying nonconventional sites for education, hip-hop artists engage popular audiences in subconscious pedagogy, actualising absent or avoided protests. These subconscious learning experiences negate the dominant messages.

My personal experiences with mediated representations of Arab identity exemplify central problems and possibilities in my argument. Growing up in the Middle East I was exposed to the same American popular culture as an average American viewer, only not the same in volume. At a certain level, my life experiences were antidotes to slanderous images of Arabs I grew up with because my daily interactions with Arabs negated fictitious elements of Arab representation. The negotiation between fact and fiction served as my pedagogical performances, with my performers being average Arabs. Brookfield (2005) further describes such encounters:

When adults experience deep and powerful works of art such as plays, poems, pictures, songs, sculptures, or novels, they undergo a temporary estrangement from their everyday world. This estrangement is disturbing in a productive and revolutionary way. It opens adults to the realisation that they could reorder their lives to live by a fundamentally different, more instinctual ethic. (p. 54)

Interacting with people of Arab heritage is an obvious option to challenge media experiences. Another option, without seeking and interacting with Arabs, would be popular engagements. Engaging the popular, the public embark on socio-political transformation. If news media on one side politicises an Arab, on the other side, an Arab politicises the situation. The same culture destroying a community provides opportunities to (re)construct the community. Such engagement – deconstruction and reconstruction – is performativity, which is not limited to the efforts of an intellectual. Arabs need to vigorously oppose their Otherness and defend themselves as fellow

citizens and human beings, which arguably will be through pedagogy. At the same time though, pedagogy through hip-hop is limited by learners' acceptance to have their ideologies, politics, values and reality questioned.

In America, Arabs are racially categorised as White yet fail to receive accompanying privileges pertaining to social status. Arabs' involvement in social justice, certainly, does not claim privileges. Rather such advancements, forwarded by The Arab Summit and others, endeavour a status of equality as Americans. Such articulations need initiations from the Arab community. Arabs need to begin asserting their place in society. Arabs need to inform diverse audiences about their belonging. Arabs need to collectively change what being an Arab is – first for Arabs, then for the world.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

Master of Arts, Applied Communication, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana 2012-2014

- Thesis: Arab Hip-Hop and Politics of Identity: Intellectuals, Identity and Inquilab
- Committee Chair: Dr. Jonathan Paul Rossing

Bachelor of Management Studies, University of Mumbai, Maharashtra – India, 2008-2011

- Final Project: Internet Politics: Online Campaigning in India

Awards, Distinctions and Fellowships

- Top Graduate Research Award by the IUPUI Department of Communication Studies for *Countering Arabophobia Through Arab-Conscious Hip-Hop*, 2014
- Top Graduate Research Award by the IUPUI Department of Communication Studies for *#UAEDressCode: An Intercultural Approach*, 2014
- Chair's Recognition for Outstanding Leadership by the IUPUI Department of Communication Studies for TEDxIUPUI, 2013

Research Interests

My present research focuses on cultural assertions by Arab hip-hop artists; in that, how do they challenge the popular Arab and engage their audiences in public pedagogy. Additionally, I discuss the concept of Arabophobia and influence of media on society. In the future, I want to expand my research to study the epistemic function of music, analyze post-colonial identities and cultures and propose a separation of Islamic culture from Arab culture.

Publications, Presentations and Abstracts

- D'Souza, R. (2014). *Countering Arabophobia through Arab-Conscious Hip-Hop*. Presented at New Haven Hip-Hop Conference 2014, New Haven, CT
- Sheeler, K., Weiss, A. & D'Souza, R. (2014). *Communication and Citizenship: Classroom Opportunities for Practice*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- D'Souza, R. (2014). *Countering Arabophobia through Arab-Conscious Hip-Hop*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- D'Souza, R. (2014). *Countering Arabophobia through Arab-Conscious Hip-Hop*. Poster presented at IUPUI Research Day 2014, Indianapolis, IN.

Research Experience

Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Communication Studies, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN, August 2013 – May 2014

- *Conducting research for popular and academic sources, preparing bibliographies, conducting literature reviews and writing and editing material for academic publication*

- *Co-authored an essay with Dr. Sheeler discussing political deliberations in classrooms, and is due for submission*
- *Proficiency with Factiva, Google Scholar, LexisNexis, World CAT and library data bases*

Graduate Research Assistant, Survey Research Center at IUPUI, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN, September 2012 – August 2013

- *Supporting research staff through all stages of research from data collection to data analysis and reporting*
- *Training in quantitative and qualitative methods and multiple data collection procedures*
- *Proficiency with CATI, Gravic Remark, SPSS and Qualtrics*