

# Introduction

## *The Wave*

In 2010, Morocco's biggest state-sponsored musical event gave hip hop artists a central place in its programming. During the weeklong Mawazine festival, pioneering Casablanca emcee Don Bigg performed tracks from his most recent album, *Byad Ou K7al* (White and Black), in new arrangements written and performed with Cuban jazz pianist Omar Sosa and his band.<sup>1</sup> Facing several hundred screaming fans on a massive outdoor stage, Bigg not only performed international connection and debuted a hip hop performance practice innovative among his fellow Moroccans. As one of Morocco's best-known and most controversial solo emcees, he also represented the nation in a collaboration designed to express the festival's advertised commitment to cosmopolitan tolerance.

The same week that Bigg and Sosa's prime-time concert was broadcast live by state-owned television and radio station 2M, the Mawazine festival held a youth showcase called L'Mouja (*al-mouja*, "the wave"). The first edition of L'Mouja celebrated the state's embrace of youth musical cultures on all the platforms at the government's disposal. "18 groups in 12 hours," said the billboards at major intersections in Rabat, the capital city. "Under the high patronage of His Majesty Mohamed VI, see groups from *la nouvelle scène*," announced a cheery woman in bilingual ads played on 2M. "Don't miss this call," winked the banners advertising the national phone company's sponsorship of L'Mouja. Blazing with Maroc Telecom's bright logo, the banners hung in front of Parliament and protectorate-era landmarks along Avenue Mohammed V, and from the thick crenellated wall of Bab al-Had, the southern entrance to Rabat's seventeenth-century medina.

L'Mouja was a finale to the weeklong, multistage festival, but separate from it, too. To get there, one had to cross the Bouregreg River to the neighboring town

of Salé, then walk down to the edge of the beach where the Bouregreg meets the Atlantic. Starting at 2 p.m., ten hip hop groups dominated the roster, interspersed with a handful of musicians from other genres. Whether the performer was an old-school emcee known only to the most devoted hip hop fans, or a fresh new trio getting lots of attention on Facebook, everyone got twenty minutes. Nearly all of the performers had won a nationwide musical contest in the past three years.

By late afternoon, the sun still high over the ocean, perhaps two hundred teenagers and young adults were scattered within earshot of the stage's massive speakers. Between sets, I recognized a circle of young men standing a few yards away. Eventually, we realized how we knew each other: they had worked on a video shoot I had attended months before, several hours away in Fes.

The three friends, born and raised in Salé, visibly enjoyed testing my knowledge of their city's contribution to Moroccan hip hop history. Did I know that the first Moroccan hip hop album was made here in Salé? Yes, I did—by a duo named Double A. They were the first group to record raps in *Derija* (Moroccan Arabic). I interviewed an emcee from the early Salé group 19-Contre-Attack who told me a lot about local hip hop history, I added. My comment was greeted with a roar of surprise and approval as the students assured me of their pride in that group, especially its best-regarded emcee, Majesticon. "He is still my favorite rapper," said Mehdi, unbuttoning his flannel shirt to show off his handmade critique of contemporary hip hop: in iron-on letters, his T-shirt read "Where are you and where is rap? Where is respect for Majesticon?" The beginning of the next set cut off our conversation, but not before the three playfully showed off their amateur raps in front of a gathering cypher of friends and strangers.

Looking back, this festival and others like it throughout the summer of 2010 represent a peak of visible state involvement in hip hop culture. On one hand, major concerts like Don Bigg's collaboration with Omar Sosa leveraged the country's best-known hip hop toward the state's public relations goals, successfully provoking statements on Morocco's cultural wealth and modernity in international media. Young Moroccans, tourists, and journalists were simultaneously targeted by the festival's explicit messages of racial and religious tolerance. At the same time, practitioners took advantage of Mawazine's multiple smaller performance spaces to continue to cultivate the culture. On Salé's beach at the edge of Rabat, where few international journalists ventured, young people met, honed their skills, and celebrated local histories through hip hop.

Many of today's most fervent fans have never heard of Majesticon. Without archives of the tapes and burned CDs on which early hip hop circulated, they couldn't hear him if they wanted to. But long before the state decided to embrace "the wave" that had washed over Morocco's Atlantic coast, pioneers like Majesticon sought—and built—a genre that could sound out the future, a music as expansive and poignant as their critiques.

Over the first two decades of Moroccan hip hop history, roughly from 1990 to 2011, hip hop music and dance moved from makeshift rehearsal spaces, bedroom



FIGURE 1. Mehdi Lyoubi, aka Mehdi Black Wind, shows the author his T-shirt, 2010. Photo by author.

studios, and empty youth centers to ad campaigns, royal commendations, and the nation's biggest festivals. When Moroccan hip hop practitioners first gained national attention in the early 2000s, unsympathetic commentators had used the term "wave" differently: something that had rolled in from outside and would soon recede from the nation's shores. As late as 2007, London-based daily *Asharq al-Awsat* found that a professional musician judging a Moroccan musical competition thought of hip hop as a foreign fad. "What are the opinions of musicians on this new musical wave?" asked the Rabat correspondent in an article sensationally headlined "'Revolutionary' Songs and Their Effects on the Youth: Sports Jerseys, Baggy Jeans, Chains and Earrings." Belaid al-'Akkaf, a decorated Amazigh composer best known to the public from his 1970s fusion band Ousmane, noted that "this kind of song is heard a lot . . . in Black neighborhoods in the US and on the edges of French cities, where . . . it has a great effect on social and political life, and its authors are [politically] aware." By contrast, al-'Akkaf felt "songs by Moroccan rap groups are empty, full of insults and pessimism." However, he stressed that the answer to this aesthetic and cultural problem did not lay with the youths themselves, but with the ministry of culture, which had failed up to that point to "direct the youth through specialized cultural centers" in order to advance "the country's artistic sector" (al-'Arousi 2007).

Al-'Akkaf's response was not simply that of a curmudgeonly classical musician. He voiced widespread assumptions about hip hop that are still commonplace, and still contested, in Morocco today. First, he assumed that "rap music" is a style, rather than one facet of a generationally significant and thoroughly indigenized multimedia culture encompassing emceeing, beatmaking and production, graffiti and visual art, dance, photography, and fashion. Instead of defining that style through its aesthetic characteristics, he defined it as a tool for making social and political change. He also expressed an ingrained Moroccan exceptionalism, implying that while engaged artists in France and the United States may have legitimate grievances, Moroccan youths are merely enjoying the opportunity to flout authority. Finally, al-'Akkaf expected the Moroccan state to respond to the changing needs of youths—not to support their interests, but to reach its own goals for shaping the citizenry. Mawazine's L'Mouja, which ran from 2010 to 2012, met all of al-'Akkaf's goals: the event promoted the state's competitions by showcasing the winners—offering artists fleeting exposure to international journalists and fans—and allowed the state to claim it was building the infrastructure for a robust popular music market.<sup>2</sup>

This book argues that the wave has, in fact, saturated the center: hip hop artists were at the leading edge of Morocco's neoliberal transition, and today—despite their continuing struggles to be better heard—are vital to the neoliberalized nation-state. Moroccan neoliberalization included embracing the top-down economic policies imposed on many developing nations during the 1980s and '90s. But the effects of these policies, and the rhetorics that accompanied them, also

encouraged young Moroccans to think of themselves as a different kind of person than their parents. Through their investments in hip hop culture, practitioners imagine, rehearse, and embody new forms of citizenship during a new political-economic conjuncture for the nation.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the varied ways practitioners have institutionalized their musical culture align with, if not support, many goals of the state.

For many state and state-sponsored agencies, hip hop has been a useful tool. For its practitioners, it is a way of life, with daily implications for ethics, aesthetics, and relationships, as well as politics. For over thirty years, the first generation of Moroccan hip hop artists has advanced a theory of citizenship that posits that Moroccans do have the power to change things about their country—specific things, in specific ways. For over twenty years, their success on state-sponsored stages has helped neutralize the radical potential of that theory. Like a wave, Moroccan hip hop cannot be separated from the broader circulatory context of the transnational hip hop tradition, yet its emergence at the end of the 1980s rearranged the world it engulfed in particular ways.

#### VALUES THAT PAY

Part of the story of this genre—and of this book in turn—is the history of practitioners' struggles to benefit from state instrumentalization rather than to be controlled by it. North Africanists frequently analyze Moroccan life in terms of the state's authoritarianism, a tendency heightened by the need to grapple with unfinished reforms prompted by the February 20 movement in 2011–12, during the so-called Arab Spring.<sup>4</sup> Yet musicians' struggles over aesthetics and ideals are not solely a repudiation or embrace of the state's vision of its subjects. Like anywhere else, practitioners also debate musical beauty, poetic virtuosity, proper conduct, and many other issues well beyond their resonances at the national level. At the same time, the control and legitimacy accorded the Moroccan monarchy, the four-hundred-year-old 'Alaoui dynasty, and the powerful circle known as the Makhzen does affect every horizon of possibility.<sup>5</sup> Throughout this book, I demonstrate that individuals' experiences of state power are diverse and fragmented, differentiated by many factors including their class position, religion, ethnic background, education, gender, and sexuality. Yet across these different experiences, the state can and does shape not only what musicians can compose, where they can play it, whether they are compensated, and how their music is heard, but what they desire to create. Nor is this state of affairs incompatible with practitioners' own experiences as market actors: today's state is deeply invested in producing a transnational market for Moroccan popular musics that reaches north across the Mediterranean and south into West and Central Africa.

How, then, to write about the political, economic, and symbolic control exercised by the monarchy and the state without writing as if, as Barry Shank puts it,

“the music has simply served as a vehicle, conveying already shared political sentiments back and forth among singers and listeners” (2014: 2)? How to keep not only aesthetic but also political and ethical ambiguity in play in this text as it is in everyday life?<sup>6</sup> I have responded to these questions by focusing on the multiple registers of “value.” The title of this book comes from a 2007 interview given by Don Bigg to Magharebia.com, a trilingual news outlet sponsored by the US Department of State from 2004 to 2015. Don Bigg answered a question about his success by asserting that “authenticity and sincerity are values that pay.”<sup>7</sup>

“Value” simultaneously designates those attributes of anything worth exchanging and personal beliefs that may be recognized in others, but cannot be traded. Yet for the neoliberal subject disadvantaged in the global market economy, both kinds of value collapse into each other precisely because one is forced to imagine oneself—including one’s beliefs and intentions—as a collection of attributes in order to extract value from them (Foucault 2008; Muehlebach 2012; Rudnyckyj 2010).<sup>8</sup> Some of hip hop’s most trenchant critiques, in the United States and elsewhere, start from the recognition of this reality, while simultaneously celebrating what Wendy Brown characterizes as a “sacrificial” relation to capital (2015: 210–12; Rose 1994). Across very different places, relations within communities and to oneself are profoundly reshaped by the feedback loop of increasing precarity and individuals’ self-cultivation as both market actors and marketable assets.

*Values That Pay* makes visible two threads of what Loïc Wacquant calls “actually existing neoliberalism” (2012). One focuses on technologies of governance that reinforce state power even as they shift expectations and material support from public to private. The other locates subjects’ understandings of themselves within the emergent marketization, or “economization,” of formerly nonmarket domains of life (Brown 2016; Ganti 2014; Hilgers 2011). My interlocutors create unexpected meanings at the intersection of these threads. Following Marc D. Perry (2016), Eithne Quinn (2005), Lester Spence (2011), and others, I track hip hop as both an expression of neoliberalization as well as a tool for intervening in it. Framing Moroccan hip hop in this way intervenes in a third dimension of neoliberalism research, one in which ordinary people are not only subject to neoliberal discourses and rationalities but agents of their local spread, expression, and acceptance (Elyachar 2005).

Morocco’s history offers a distinctive vantage point on economic and cultural neoliberalization. Wacquant insists that “*what is ‘neo’ about neoliberalism . . . [is] the remaking and redeployment of the state . . . [to fabricate] the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to making the fiction of markets real and consequential*” (2012: 68, italics in original). However, the Moroccan monarchy and Makhzen’s control over and profit from both publicly and privately owned corporations and agencies is only the most modern instantiation of the dynasty’s historic imbrication of state and economy. Like his father King Hassan II, King Mohamed VI embodies a continuity between precapitalist and neoliberal



forms in which different sources of power are united in a single individual. The contemporary state's efforts to make markets "real and consequential" rely on the monarchy's traditional strategies of patronage, distribution, and coercion.<sup>9</sup> In the following chapters, I show that while neoliberalization's economic benefits were largely captured by existing elites (Catusse 2009; Zemni and Bogaert 2011), the cultural neoliberalization that accompanied this transition found visible and audible leadership in hip hop artists.

Morocco received its first loans from the International Monetary Fund in the first years of the 1980s (Cohen and Jaidi 2006). As in other postcolonial states at that time, the IMF required a number of macroeconomic reforms in exchange for funding. These included opening capital and consumer markets, increasing foreign direct investment, privatizing state-owned industries, deregulating industries, lowering taxes on enterprise, shedding public-sector jobs, and cutting domestic subsidies (Maghraoui 2001 and 2002; Pfeifer 1999). While the political rationalities (Brown 2003) that undergirded neoliberalization in Europe and the Americas during the 1980s and '90s grafted conservative ideologies onto an economic model, arguing that shifting states' provisions for its citizens onto markets was freeing, North African economic neoliberalization has helped maintain or even enhance the powers of the regions' authoritarian governments (Cavatorta 2007; Kabel 2021; Kohstall 2015).

Moroccan neoliberalization is less a transformation of political and economic power than a shift in elite economic tactics whose effects reverberate throughout society. At the same time, continuing social, moral, and ethical regimes are deeply integrated into Morocco's newly created or formalized markets (Kapchan 1996). Though the state has carried out sweeping economic reforms that reduced its roles in health, education, employment, and other domains since the 1980s, this has not lessened the government's power nor citizens' perception of its power.

Government-supported rhetoric about who was a valued Moroccan, and whose visibility and audibility was boosted by state efforts, changed starting in the late 1990s. While the ascension of King Mohamed VI in 1999 raised expectations of increased cultural and press freedoms, the new monarch also called repeatedly for his subjects to embrace their roles in market reform. Young artists observed and responded to socioeconomic change throughout the 1990s and 2000s, modeling the ways a neoliberal citizen might simultaneously challenge the harms of new policies and come to see their interpersonal, cultural, and social capital in economic terms. Throughout the first decades of the twenty-first century, as the faces, images, and sounds of hip hop began to be incorporated into state-sponsored and private advertising, the cultural edge of Morocco's socioeconomic upheaval came to index young, leisured consumers as the ideal citizen who would carry the country into the future.

Well before select artists gained national recognition in the early 2000s, amateur hip hop artists and their fans developed ways of interacting with each other

and state institutions that responded to new state-market forms. On the one hand, practitioners followed an ideology circulated both through international neoliberal norms and mainstream US hip hop's representations of a neoliberal self—locating the solutions to social problems in individual choices, celebrating wealth, and investing in themselves to produce social and cultural capital. At the same time, artists and listeners also used hip hop's tradition of synthetic argumentation to insist on a holistic conception of citizenship, in which social, economic, and political rights are seen as inseparable from one another, to critique and make claims on the state.

For hip hop practitioners with whom I worked, being a citizen ideally means sharing the wealth created by the nation-state's global market participation and the eventual telos that participation implies—accession to the “developed” world. Throughout this book, I show how my interlocutors understood market participation, whether as consumers, advertisers, or creators, as an act of identification with the nation. In this way, citizenship becomes associated with economic progress as much as, if not more than, with ideas about national identity or fealty to the state and its rulers. Paradoxically, this has occurred over the same time and in relationship to the ways that the state has ceased to take responsibility for economic security. In subsequent chapters, I break out how hip hop practitioners responded to, and in some cases anticipated, the reduction and transformation of public and social institutions to private capital by building the market-oriented institutions encouraged by both King Mohamed VI and neoliberal guardians like the World Bank (Chauffour 2018: vi–xv). Practitioners' vision of citizenship is then, willingly or unwillingly, participating in the state's unavoidable need to bet on the nation's future in the global market economy.

In creating thriving local expressions of transnational hip hop culture, first-generation practitioners taught each other and the next generation their own citizenship praxis, seeking to influence their political and economic futures simultaneously.<sup>10</sup> In this way, practitioners fill what Anita Chari calls “a debilitating lacuna” in the study of neoliberal societies: “the inability to grasp the relationship between a sensate micropolitics of subjectivation and a critique of political economy” (2020: 2). Precisely because hip hop practitioners pursued their vision of a more engaged, more empowered citizenry within the norms of neoliberal entrepreneurship, they found themselves no longer considered “surplus” but valuable to the state (Gilmore 1998; Wacquant 2008: 266).

Yet, as micropolitical moments emerge in performance through each chapter of this book, I show that focusing solely on the state's strategies of incorporation obscures practitioners' investments in their own visions of citizenship.<sup>11</sup> These investments include participating in historic forms of patronage but do not preclude artists' and audiences' agency to align with some authority figures or issues and not others. Starting from the premise that artists genuinely believe in what they imagine the state can be, I show how some actively sought to integrate both



the potential conflicts and alignments of hip hop culture's aesthetics and ethics with their devotion to their preferred Moroccan future.

I conceptualize hip hop artists' and fans' citizenship practices, whether in one-on-one interactions or shouted from a massive stage, as expressive of necessities in tension with each other. These tensions serve as themes that weave throughout the book. First, the institutionalization of Moroccan hip hop embodies the productive frictions between historicism and innovation in hip hop's genre conventions and between the collective and the individual in its values (Tsing 2005). Here, institutionalization includes not only the ways that hip hop practitioners and practices emerge within state-sponsored agencies, but what practitioners have built among themselves. Second, my interlocutors' citizenship practices require, and produce, tensions between complicity and sincerity, competition and solidarity. I argue that these practices and values encompass individuals' desire for both mobility and secure community and thus hinge on a productive ambiguity. And most importantly, each of these tensions is simultaneously central to transnational hip hop aesthetics and to everyday life under neoliberalism.

#### REDEFINING COMPLICITY

What does obligation mean to a neoliberal citizen? What might new ties and senses of obligation sound like?

Concerns about ethnographers' complicity, developed among feminist anthropologists and subsequently incorporated into the reflexive turn of the 1990s, are vital to contemporary anthropology and ethnomusicology (Abu-Lughod 1990; Behar and Gordon 1995; Marcus 1997; Visweswaran 1997).<sup>12</sup> Less often do we address the ways our research subjects are simultaneously agents and victims of structural harm. Despite the fact that many of my interlocutors broadly agreed with the state's goals for its citizens, no term evokes the queasy mix of celebration and containment, tactics and traps, carrots and sticks they negotiated under Morocco's authoritarian neoliberalism better than complicity.

Since the 1990s, when music scholars began to grapple with the production and circulation of "world music" as a manifestation of neocolonial economic structures (e.g., Feld 2000; Frith 2000; Guilbault 1993; Taylor 1997), scholars have continued to focus on the ways relatively disenfranchised musicians attempt to gain advantage from international circulation despite—or through—processes of exoticization vital to that circulation (e.g., Kapchan 2007; Kheshti 2015; Meintjes 2004 and 2017; Whitmore 2013 and 2016). On these and other topics, we strive to depict our research subjects as critical actors who weigh many considerations as they select tactics from a circumscribed set of options. We pay close attention to factors that impinge upon those options, and we describe a wide variety of responses to inequity beyond traditional political mobilization or overt protest. We generally avoid judging approaches to working within inequity as successes or failures,

even if they have no or negative effects.<sup>13</sup> We value what we can learn from others as they navigate overlapping, locally specific discourses on politics, ethics, and aesthetics, and we seek to understand their reasoning rather than assuming the universality of our own.

I suggest that in acknowledging the diverse orientations, politics, and unintended consequences of our interlocutors' agency, we acknowledge power relations that are best understood through a renewed definition of complicity. Used in its everyday sense, complicity is an accusation or judgment on a person or group of individual actors. Discussions of complicity in literature, legal studies, and philosophy focus, typically, on how to assess individual culpability in singular acts as a witting or unwitting bystander, beneficiary, or supporter (Zola 1996 [1898]; Sanders 2002; Ziemer 2017; Mellema 2016).<sup>14</sup> Complicity frequently connotes an action or lack of action that reveals misplaced loyalties, a breach of obligations to one group in favor of benefits from another.

Such formulations imply that whether we are doing or not doing something, saying or not saying something, complicit individuals are those who have the power to align themselves with greater powers. Traditional accusations of complicity hold people higher in intersecting hierarchies responsible for having more freedom—more choices, more agency, greater ability to impact unequal structures. On the other hand, Thomas Docherty argues that “complicity” should instead imply unfreedom: “If a bond is entered into by someone who is so constrained by circumstance that *the bond itself is simply an articulation of power*, then cooperation has become complicity” (2016: 69, italics mine). In this perspective, economic and social elites can benefit from unequal advantages and access and still be unable to successfully challenge the source of their power. This framing resonates with the Moroccan monarchy's historic strategies of elite capture, as well as with recent reform efforts by relatively affluent actors (Schroeter 1998; Bennani-Chraïbi 2011; Heckman 2021).

At the same time, considering those with less capital, power, or freedom complicit with a dominant regime recognizes both their entrapment and their survival tactics. It simultaneously accepts the reach of disciplinary forms of power and the agency of the dominated, without requiring a position on their beliefs (e.g., Stein 1998).<sup>15</sup> Just as citizens can oppose their nation-state's policies and benefit from them at the same time, other citizens can support policies that diminish everyone's rights in favor of an idea, a value, or the belief that their group is diminished the least. Both positions appear internally contradictory; both could make sense for people across social classes; both involve complicity with dominant power in different ways.

The idea of complicity captures the simultaneous economic participation and (partial, varied, contextual) ideological rejection characteristic of neoliberal life across socioeconomic classes—precisely because its historic usage presumes

the agency and awareness of the complicit subject. Confusion between agents' choices, or lack thereof, and the structures in which they are implicated is part of what makes traditional accusations of complicity so devastating. If, as Fred Moten suggests, "appeals . . . are always already embedded in the structure they would escape," then assessing complicity may involve untangling agents' felt acceptance or rejection of structures from their possible moves within those structures (Moten 2003: 2).<sup>16</sup>

For Mark Sanders, responsibility begins with a recognition of all humanity's "foldedness," our complicity with the worst and best parts of ourselves. In *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*, he argues that we have essential responsibilities to each other by virtue of our shared humanness. To deny those, as in South African apartheid, is to deny humanity to others. Yet in order to make radical arguments for love and respect based on shared humanity, we must affirm our complicity with humans who fundamentally disagree with the notion of shared humanity itself and who align themselves with the dehumanizing state (Sanders 2002: 8). Moreover, even militant forms of resistance are complicit in this broad sense. Like Moten using Judith Butler to note our inescapable connections to and responsibility for the structures that constrain us, Sanders invokes Derridean deconstructionism to argue that "opposition takes its first steps from a footing of complicity" (Sanders 2002: 8).

For these and other thinkers, the bedrock idea unifying concepts of complicity is an unavoidable commitment to other people, whether individuals, a group, or the idea of humanity.<sup>17</sup> We might gloss complicity, most simply, as the inability to avoid participation in something, but this misses the connotations that give complicity its important role. Without the dimensions of judgment and responsibility, the concept of complicity makes little sense, because the need for it seems to disappear. Instead, if we describe it more fully as the recognition that one bears responsibility for one's inability to avoid participating in something that harms others, then these inalienable dimensions illuminate how the complicity concept challenges ideas of the individual subject (Butler 2020). Yet complicity also continues to insist on the agent, however compromised, in what is a collective (because somehow coerced) event. In this way, feeling and acting responsible for another individual for the length of a specific interaction or relationship, and feeling and acting responsible for humanity in general over one's lifetime, are fundamentally envisioned as similar.

From this perspective, complicity is not only possible in many different kinds of relationships; it is a shared, constitutive, constantly renegotiated part of the human condition. Thus, despite their important differences, both scholarly and popular understandings of complicity engage in a systemic way of thinking about human collectivity that neoliberalization fundamentally seeks to negate. Complicity requires and reveals collectivity, a belonging through collective responsibility,

that continues even in the face of increased cultivation and celebration of the individual. In exploring this dynamic, I seek a theoretically and ethnographically sound response to neoliberalism's naturalization of *Homo economicus* that renders alignments with its political, economic, and cultural hegemony more visible—regardless of how individuals in this book feel about the effects of neoliberalization.<sup>18</sup> Grappling with relations of complicity as a theoretical framework and a lived necessity helps me to see similarities and differences during and after neoliberal transition.

Throughout this book, I reframe complicity as a diagnosis of shifting topologies of power, using it to describe relationships between agents instead of a critique of those agents. By tracking both the limits and possibilities my interlocutors face at different scales, I seek to foreground the paradoxical relationship between individual and community in concepts of complicity. As an analytic, complicity allows me to refocus on chosen and unchosen collectivities, link structural effects and individual actions, and place anticipated and unanticipated outcomes in conjunction with other agents and forces.<sup>19</sup> Framing my interlocutors as complicit—just like their co-citizens—enables me to recognize various kinds of agency and constantly changing relational identities without losing sight of practitioners' very real constraints.

Before, during, and after the Arab Spring, Moroccan police and judicial forces capriciously leveled fines, jail, and physical harm in response to sufficiently explicit expressions of resistance, in ways that recalled for many the postindependence period of political repression known as the Years of Lead (Fr. *les années de plomb*, Ar. *al-zaman al-rusas*). In such a context, Moroccan artists of all genres may reasonably understand themselves as unfree. In cases throughout this book, political and economic inequality constrain and perpetuate the partnership some hip hop artists appear to enter into with the state, making analyses of complicity an entry point into analysis of the co-construction of Moroccan power.

As I use it here, complicity continues a commitment to illustrating my interlocutors' agency while capturing the limits of peoples' choices, including in situations where critical or resistant actions still support normative ethics, politics, or sociality. In examples throughout this book, emcees have perfected the invocation of the state's ostensible goals, its simultaneous statements of universality and Moroccan exceptionalism, in order to critique the state's failures by its own supposed standards. With their fellow musicians, emcees make audible the "state of exception" that must exist for neoliberalization to exist (Ong 2006). Crucially, they can do this and be personally committed to the version of governmentality for which the state ostensibly strives at the same time. In this way, before and alongside Moroccan practitioners' inability to avoid state and municipal sponsorship of most live performances, they cannot avoid complicity with the state's goals and rationalities.

Finally, in thinking through relations of and as complicity, I am not claiming the lived experience to appropriately apply the multiple logics of moral responsibility that Moroccans might use. Instead, I am attempting to present my interlocutors as complex, contradictory actors and thinkers. In interrogating my representations of them in relation to common narratives in hip hop or North African studies, I have sought to take seriously their self-understanding as moral, rather than merely political, subjects.

During the period of my research, Moroccan hip hop artists were committed to their art forms, the social world their art makes possible, and, frequently, to each other in the short-term collaborative sense emphasized in legal definitions of criminal complicity (Ziemer 2017). At the same time, their commitment to each other and themselves was often aligned with the state's expressed goals. Their complicit relations were neither entirely involuntary nor entirely unwitting, precisely because my interlocutors make experience-based calculations about the short- and long-term benefits of their actions to themselves and their communities. But they were also not understood as a "choice" in the traditional sense of the term, whether because hip hop practitioners felt compelled to make art or because they were compelled to accept and support some—if not all—state policies and effects. As the emcee Masta Flow once told me, echoing many and perhaps riffing on Jay-Z's "December 4th," "I didn't choose rhymes. Rhymes, they chose me."<sup>20</sup>

My analysis thus redefines complicity as the double-edged impulse that allows us to see all humankind as related, while also suspending that vision to tacitly accept unjust things that benefit us. From this perspective, complicity reveals a constant dynamic of community formation and reformation. Likewise, strategizing among the options provided by the powerful, or "making a way out of no way," reappears as an unavoidable way to maintain one's safety and security by embracing the realities of complicitous relations.

This is another way of stating the obvious: people struggling to flourish within the spaces they are allowed do not always have the luxury of rejectionist politics. Reflecting on the US Department of State's Next Level program, hip hop theater artist Will Power suggested that "the real question . . . is not if one is complicit, but whether one can do good in the world despite the inescapable complicity of modern life" (Katz 2020: 137). Mark Katz concludes that State Department-affiliated artists "*know* that to live with these ambiguities without seeking to resolve them is . . . the mark of a good citizen" (Katz 2020: 137, my italics). Like the artists Katz worked with as Next Level's director, Moroccan hip hop artists cannot avoid the unresolvable tensions that accompany the state's valorization (or "marking") of specific expressions of citizenship. Suspending attempts to resolve them is an action, or lack of action, both hip hop practitioners and Moroccans in general must take at least some of the time to navigate authoritarianism. Throughout this

book, I argue that when artists follow their vision of the good through their complicity with Morocco's intertwined state and markets, their actions reverberate, reshaping Moroccan ideals of contemporary citizenship.

### SINCERITY

Months before the first L'Mouja event at the 2010 Mawazine festival, Tangerois emcee Muslim released "A.K.A. Moutamarred (A.K.A. Rebel)." "My rap is a revolution, not just a wave," he declared in his signature growl in the second verse. "Rap's not my life, it's rap or my death."<sup>21</sup> Widely celebrated as Morocco's leading underground stylist because of his "hard" beats, persona, vocal timbre, and laser-like focus on inequality, Muslim had carefully guarded a reputation as an uncompromising critic since his solo debut in 2005. While he and others who shared his topics often performed at state-sponsored festivals, until 2018 fans rarely saw Muslim's performance venues as contradicting his critiques.

In spring 2018, the simmering discontent annually provoked by the Mawazine festival's lavish budget and high ticket prices overlapped with a related movement against Moroccan- and European-owned conglomerates. The French dairy company Danone and the Moroccan Afriquia gas and Sidi Ali bottled water, each of whom lead their markets in the country, were accused of price gouging. Facebook posts and profile pictures with the phrase *#مقاطعون* (*#muqat'aoun*, or "boycotter") spread from April throughout the summer, leading to an actual boycott designed to force lower prices. Widespread participation resulted in significant drops in sales, protests, and counterprotests by Moroccan Danone employees.<sup>22</sup> The boycott of everyday items revived calls for a boycott of the Mawazine festival—the biggest, most expensive, and most obviously elite of Morocco's state-sponsored festivals, a centerpiece of the state's international tourism strategy.<sup>23</sup>

In this heated moment, when complaints about the Moroccan business elite's abuses of power and ties to the government were suddenly public, Muslim was allegedly caught negotiating to publicly support Mawazine. A viral video uploaded by "Saddam Darwish" purported to have recorded Muslim taking a phone call from a Canadian PR firm. According to the caller, the firm was working to counter negative sentiments about Mawazine among Moroccans at home and abroad. The speaker, "James," who mixed Canadian-accented English with fluent Modern Standard Arabic, proposed that Muslim promote VIP packages to the festival on his social media accounts for a fee of \$20,000. After some discussion—and encouragement from James to name his price—a muffled voice responded, "Can we make it double? (Fin n'amel double?)"<sup>24</sup> While many assumed the video was a hoax, several people I spoke to and followed the comments of insisted that Muslim had been successfully exposed. Reactions ranged from indifference to disgust to disbelief.



Later that day, I was told afterward, Muslim prompted a fresh round of discussion when he posted a Facebook note. Without confirming or denying his participation, he took issue with what he saw as commentators' insufficient support for artists' labor: "Whether I am paid four thousand or forty thousand, it's my business," my friends reported him writing.<sup>25</sup>

Experienced performers saw the entire viral event as a reflection of the state of Moroccan hip hop culture. "If you look at all of my [Facebook page], two comments are about *le Mondial* [the World Cup], and 99 percent are about Muslim," exclaimed Casablanca emcee Soultana the night the video was released. She compared Muslim to the equally famous rap group Fnaine, generally regarded as his stylistic and ideological opposite. "I used to clash with them all the time in my interviews," she recalled. "But they are not like Muslim. We know what they wanted from hip hop."

"You mean, to be pop stars?" I clarified.

"Yes! We knew this."<sup>26</sup>

For the many fans who left irate, mocking, or heartbroken comments on Muslim's Facebook and Instagram pages, the disjuncture between Muslim's artistic persona and his behavior—the appearance of hypocrisy—was upsetting. However, the accusations of hypocrisy did not center on the exposure of the businessman, and therefore the business, of hip hop. The problem was not in Muslim asking to be paid more; it lay in allegedly accepting to leverage his reputation to push expensive tickets to the most affluent concertgoers. Instead of being paid for his artistry, he would earn money helping the Moroccan state do what he consistently critiqued in his songs: circulate capital and access between elites to the exclusion of others.

Muslim's reported defense—essentially, that he should get whatever the market for his services would bear—sidestepped the issue of whether his values matched those of his songs by invoking a tenet of neoliberal doctrine: maximizing one's opportunity is self-evidently good and appropriate.<sup>27</sup> At issue, in the end, were competing definitions of sincerity. That this was his only public response suggested that Muslim saw his forthright expression of desire for greater capital as a sufficient rationale. Some fans, on the other hand, understood his alleged choice to partner with Mawazine as calling into question his self-representation as unmediated and sincere. For some of the disgruntled fans who believed what they heard in that viral video, when Muslim asked for "double" the proposed fee, he was speculating on the value of his previous, trenchant critiques of Moroccan inequality.

Sincerity is a core value in the transnational hip hop tradition, expressed through both live performance and everyday interaction.<sup>28</sup> Yet it is difficult to define. Paradoxically, as a performance practice, it is often expressed through intensity, through bending or breaking norms and thus revealing local, intersectional standards of "the real." John L. Jackson theorizes sincerity as an alternative framework to authenticity that privileges "each subject's individual ability to

determine the contours of the real” (2004: 192). While authenticity requires constant reauthorization, he argues, analytically “sincerity’ provides a mechanism for asking how the deconstructed identity continues to powerfully/unfairly structure people’s lives and life chances” (2010: S285). Yet precisely because it is internal, sincerity is difficult or impossible to locate as a quality, rather than as moves that serve to reinvent and subsequently reinforce authentications (2004: 175).

My emphasis on sincerity stems from its value for Moroccan hip hop practitioners. Like Muslim’s recorded repertoire, many emcees both depend on and play with listeners’ expectations that their professional personae and their lyrics are accurate depictions of, if not their own “real” lives, someone’s lived experience. As many artists have explained to me over the years, they were initially drawn to hip hop because it offered a way to discuss “real” subjects: to transform popular musicking into a site where injustice and inequality could be debated and denounced, rather than a site exclusively for what they saw as repetitive, love song-based escapism. When Bigg told his interviewer, in 2007, that “authenticity and sincerity are values that pay,” he referred to his then-shocking choice to critique both state power and apathetic Moroccans in equal measure, in a way both fans and detractors recognized as honest and reflective of their opinions. While ironic and sarcastic expressions pepper Moroccan hip hop lyrics as they do in other places, overall, artists’ sincere affect makes a counterpublic possible (Salois 2014).

Don Bigg’s statement not only crystallized the neoliberal contradiction within the transnational hip hop tradition for me, but recalled the interdependence of authenticity and sincerity within hip hop cultures. Some early hip hop scholarship focused on authenticity in response to a widespread discourse, invoked by some and critiqued by others, in which successful commodification was opposed to authentic expression (Holt 2020). Assumptions, or less often explicit invocations, of sincerity appear in US hip hop studies to bridge this presumed contradiction (Harrison 2006; Zanfanga 2017).

Similar assumptions appear in Moroccan artists’ statements. In an interview published in the earliest years of Moroccan media interest in hip hop, pioneering emcee and ragga artist Barry claimed that “nearly all the kids of the rich who pretend to be underground are not,” but he also sought to transcend background by defining “underground” as a quality of sincerity: “If it’s not money that makes the difference, it’s the spirit. I can’t explain it to you, the underground is a lot of things. A true underground artist is [underground] in the soul. An underground [artist] who plays sentimental [music] or writes insipid words leaves the underground” (Amale 2004). Being underground, in Barry’s sense, was to be both politically and musically committed, regardless of how popular one’s music became.

Writing from a much different perspective, the beatmaker and producer West posted a Facebook manifesto he titled “Hitologie” in 2010:

[To] make a hit is to have made your heart vibrate at the same time as the kick [drum], the hand at the same time as the snare . . . the hit is an art that only he

who loves music can appreciate. . . . It's an essence that is drawn from the most profound of our sensibilities. . . . I did not create my music, I gave birth to it. It is beautiful and I admire it in all sincerity and simplicity because it is born of my love (March 13, 2010).

In his passionate defense of the musical and sensorial value of “hits,” West invoked the same devotion Barry suggests is central to the underground sensibility. Today, with his beats sought after by leading Moroccan and French trap artists, West continues unapologetically to reach mass markets.

Debates over authenticity and sincerity entangle with the commodification of race and difference—and the equally commodified combat of destructive racial stereotypes—throughout the transnational hip hop tradition. If sincerity is considered to belong exclusively to “moderns,” then both Black and Muslim subjects are categorized as nonmodern, to the extent that observers have refused to grant them sincerity’s associated qualities of spontaneity, interiority, and individualism.<sup>29</sup>

In the logic deployed by American courts, in which amateur emcees’ lyrics are routinely taken as confessional evidence of their crimes, Black Americans are assumed to be inalienably “real.” As Erik Nielsen and Travis Gosa explain, “Reading . . . violent lyrics as a *type of autobiography* ignores rap’s artistic conventions, thereby negating it as an art form, and perpetuates enduring stereotypes about the inherent criminality of young men of color” (Nielsen et al. 2015: 6, *italics mine*; Nielsen and Dennis 2019).<sup>30</sup> When artists are not allowed the possibility that their rhymes voice a character, they are not allowed the possibility of a distinctive personhood separate from that character. Choosing to understand some people’s expressions as authentic, and others as sincere, can be a form of racecraft (Fields and Fields 2012). Further, artists must find a way to succeed by creating products that conform, for those who hear them this way, to a demand for transparent Black subjectivities. Both hip hop and SWANA-region scholars have described artists’ felt knowledge of this requirement by building on Sarah Thornton’s concept of “subcultural capital” (Thornton 1995; Quinn 2005; Nooshin 2005; Spence 2011; Nickell 2020).

In a similar fashion, in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern anthropology of the mid-twentieth century, ethnographers theorized societies built around honor and shame instead of guilt, obligation instead of spontaneity, collectivity instead of interiority (e.g., Péristiany 1966). This framework intersected with that of religious scholars, who continue to grapple with the lack of interiority granted to Muslim subjects by earlier disciplinary assumptions. As Paul Powers notes, early non-Muslim scholars of Islam denigrated Muslims as “mere formalists” (Tisdale 1910, as quoted in Powers 2004). He argues that contemporary scholars still fail to recognize their own belief that “embodied praxis has less value than inward, silent, private, meditative, ‘spiritual’ activity” (Powers 2004: 452).<sup>31</sup> Ingrained assumptions define what is seen as properly religious and properly individual in terms

of each other: both depend on a model of the individual in which the self, and its emotions, exist before the action. In this way, ethnographers and religious scholars positioned emphases on social ties, interdependence, and embodied worship practices in opposition to liberal selfhood, a tradition of reasoning that Saba Mahmood effectively turned inside out (2005).<sup>32</sup>

In these logics, who gets to be the liberal, fully human self is policed from the outside (Skeggs 2014: 8). As an analytic, sincerity's opacity is perhaps its greatest strength, precisely because it forces recognition of practitioners' interiority. Understanding hip hop artists' performances and choices as sincere not only embraces the conventions of the form, but can also be an antiracist way of listening to music heard as synonymous with Blackness and its history of assumed transparency and forced doubleness.

As a quality of everyday interaction, sincerity—demonstrated through openness, inclusivity, and trust—has often characterized relationships I have witnessed and participated in during my research. Whether interviewing American artists about their international collaborations or watching the ways Moroccan elders share knowledge with aspiring younger artists, I have heard sincerity underpinning conversations, enabling people to vehemently disagree while conveying respect for the other's knowledge and experience. But it is not just a social good. Sincerity makes possible aesthetic critique and therefore continuing competency (Schloss 2009: 3). Asked to recollect their memories of hip hop fandom from the early 1990s, pioneering Moroccan artists described nascent collectives where sincerity enabled both artistic achievement and lifelong friendships. Close bonds emerged from trying (and failing) to improve one's awkward footwork or clunky rhymes with one's peers and across neighborhood and socioeconomic boundaries.

In the examples above, I am equating sincerity with trust, earnestness, vulnerability, and care. These qualities describe both practitioners' relationships to their art and an idealized way of relating to others. Throughout my research, hip hop artists and fans characterized their devotion to the genre as, in part, a desire for a different way of speaking, listening, and interacting with their peers, unbound from previously stifling expectations about what to voice aloud and with whom. By growing and maintaining an expectation of sincerity within the culture, Moroccan practitioners offer each other "a subjunctive," a space where an alternative order could grow, which copes with the contradictions imposed by what they see as the hypocrisy of everyday life (Seligman et al. 2008: 20). In a very different context than the United States, emergent hip hop practitioners felt—and feel—that the constraints of their upbringings suppress certain kinds of thoughts and feelings, that they encourage a single kind of relationship between public and private selves. Practitioners, then, invoke the multiplicity of the self that sincerity implies through the aesthetics, sociality, and comportment of hip hop, in part because the genre arrived with few fixed associations in the 1980s and '90s.

In subsequent chapters, I show how sincerity is expressed in part through practitioners' labors for and with each other. The kinds of work that practitioners do for each other, for their imagined publics, and for themselves can be read simultaneously as care for each other and as investments in, or speculations on, a potentially productive future. At times, they also cross socioeconomic and gendered boundaries that my interlocutors are accustomed to in other parts of their lives.

### *Grappling with Intention*

One might note, at this point, that my theoretical framework joins a concept I observe at work (complicity) with one my interlocutors openly value (sincerity). On the one hand, I am arguing that the former can be read through the intended and unintended effects of individual actions. On the other, my interlocutors and I can only analyze how well expressions of sincerity match avowed ideas of what it means to be sincere. In both cases, my use of the terms turns their typical relations to intention and intentionality upside down. In addition, my interlocutors demonstrate a widespread belief in intentionality as a critical category of analysis in social life.

Moroccan practitioners incorporate an understanding of intention, or *niyya*, into everyday judgments and conversations. In a familiar hadith, the Prophet Muhammad is recorded as saying: "Actions are defined by intentions, and to every person what he intends (Innama al-a'mal bi-l-niyyat wa-innama li-kull imri'in ma nawa)" (Powers 2004: 427). In Islamic jurisprudence's technical definition, one formulates *niyya* to provide the proper mental preparation and frame for ritual acts like prayer and ablutions. Accordingly, Sufis in Morocco's several brotherhoods use the invocation of *niyya* during *dhikr*, the Sufi practice of "remembrance," to "[set] the self's affections toward God, removing the believer from the profane world and placing the believer in a spiritual space" (Waugh 2005: 24).

My interlocutors frequently understood one's *niyya* to inform everyday actions. As the hadith implies, *niyya* is generally understood to lie behind any behavior in any context and to be "stable and subject to the will" (Powers 2004: 454).<sup>33</sup> In turn, *niyya* informs an understanding of the individual as properly in control of her own internally transparent desires and emotional state, as well as able to correctly judge how her actions will affect others.<sup>34</sup> Discussions of the intentions behind others' actions reveal that intention is an important category of practice, considered a reasonable standard by which to understand others.

Moroccan musicians' use of *niyya* can evoke religious or moral force or, alternatively, describe one's internal struggles without reference to faith. Lyrics from patriotic first-generation hip hop groups like Fnaire and H-Kayne demonstrate how the phrase *bi niyya*, "with intention," connotes moral clarity and the desire to benefit others. In these examples, describing actions and positions encouraged by the state as performed with intention identifies them as properly Muslim

and reinforces the role of the monarch as the head of Morocco's Muslim community.<sup>35</sup> Other lyrics from rock and hip hop ensembles frequently contrast intentions with outcomes or use the term to compare interior and exterior presentations of the self.<sup>36</sup> In each of these examples, recognizing intention is one way of recognizing sincerity.<sup>37</sup>

In the following chapters, sincerity has moral force not just in a traditional liberal sense, but in our contemporary relationships to ourselves as both a resource and a product characteristic of neoliberal subjectivity. As Jackson puts it, sincerity exceeds the boundaries of authenticity imposed by the transnational hip hop tradition. At the same time, Moroccan practitioners' sincerity repairs the inevitable breaks—with one's peers and oneself—that accompany forced and unforced complicity with state discourses and goals.

### COMPETITION AND SOLIDARITY

Competition and solidarity figure throughout this book as concrete ways that my other pair-in-tension, complicity and sincerity, are lived. Years ago, on a sticky August night, I found myself gossiping with Soultana about the strengths and weaknesses of various emcees. For her, she explained, the comparisons weren't made out of jealousy. Recalling her teenage love of basketball, she said both it and emceeing gave her a chance to fulfill her competitive drive. "I don't compete with people to make them feel bad. I do it to get better. When we compete we all get better," I remember her saying. "And if I cannot compete with them because I am already better, I will compete with myself. I will be better than myself" (August 2010).

Competition always risks failure. For Soultana, that risk was at once an entrepreneurial and an ethical imperative. As one of a handful of successful female Moroccan emcees to date, Soultana fervently believed in hip hop culture as a place where women were not yet presumed to be inferior, where she could engage with her peers through her talent. Competition was a pragmatic response to insecure conditions for professional musicians, a form of self-care that enabled a valued state of continual improvement, and, perhaps, a way to open up possibilities for other women.

For her and many other practitioners I worked with, competition and risk are moral and practical investments in oneself, expressions of confidence in the future. As theorists frequently note, risk and its accompanying self-management techniques help people both embrace and cope with neoliberalism's pervasively antisystemic perspective, with its expectation that they alone are responsible for their successes and failures (e.g., Gershon 2011).

As Soultana demonstrates, risk and competition are also deeply ingrained in hip hop aesthetics and culture. Artists and fans have embraced the rhetoric and



practice of market-based competition since the birth of hip hop, producing an aesthetics that celebrated innovation and entrepreneurship. When New York artist and entrepreneur Fab 5 Freddy argued that the hip hop artist's goal is to constantly push the boundaries of accepted practice, to achieve "a style nobody can deal with" (quoted in Rose 1994: 80–81), his explanation at once fit modernist teleologies of artistic evolution, capitalist drives to proliferate consumable difference, and a commitment to resisting external evaluations of Black creativity. At the same time, living that goal requires solidarity: peers maintaining bonds across and despite scarcity and competition, striving for the pleasure and necessity of making better art separately and together.

If for Soultana every performance is a competition, she and other artists of her generation have also invested much in others: judging literal competitions, mentoring younger musicians, giving countless unpaid interviews. Just as sincerity sustains people and their relationships in the face of the contradictions provoked by complicity, solidarity promotes mutual respect within individual competitions and in the lifelong, large-scale competition for socioeconomic mobility in which Moroccans participate.

Each chapter that follows unpacks how these paired tensions work together. Many of the interactions depicted throughout this book take place in Casablanca, Morocco's economic center and the hub of hip hop practitioners' social and musical networks since hip hop's emergence at the end of the 1980s. While my research encompasses artists identified with and events in diverse Moroccan cities, including Meknes, Fes, Salé, Rabat, Tangier, and Kenitra, aspiring and established artists frequently visit Casablanca to pursue performance, recording, collaboration, or other goals.

The emphasis on Casablanca in the following chapters reveals the city's relative abundance of events and opportunities. However, in each chapter, vignettes and close readings locate the reader in a distinct time, place, and social setting, offering a counterpoint to more general observations. In this way I depict continuities from the late 2000s to my most recent in-person research in 2018.

## POSITIONING EXTRACTION

The best—or the best-intended—way to think through complicity-sincerity and competition-solidarity tensions is to apply them to myself. I am an American, a non-Muslim, and a past recipient of US federal research funds. The unearned, unavoidable currency attached to me as a young, single white woman during my dissertation research has been replaced, over time, with modest cultural capital as a familiar face, a professor, and a reasonably good speaker of Moroccan Arabic. Like any ethnographer, my positioning has allowed me access to some information while preventing access to other people, events, and knowledges. Learning

about how I was perceived, and the advantages and disadvantages those perceptions conferred during my research, took time. Yet I am nonetheless responsible for acting respectfully within them.

This book fits into postcolonial patterns of underdevelopment in which I obtain data from the “raw material” of my interlocutors’ lives and create a monograph whose “value added” is directed toward my peers in Europe and North America. This remains true regardless of whether this book succeeds in destabilizing larger narratives about North African or Muslim difference, or whether you as a reader find that my approach sufficiently interrogates its own culpability. As voices from within and without the discipline have recently observed, such patterns have underpinned American ethnomusicology since its earliest endeavors, rendering the discipline strikingly similar in logic to the “world music” industry we often critique and to the neo- and postcolonialism we often study (Brown 2020; Kheshti 2015; Kim and Veal 2016; Taylor 2014).

This structure obtains through, not despite, the “friendship model” of ethnography upon which I have relied. In a controversial essay, Benjamin Teitelbaum cites mostly ethnomusicologists to describe the friendship model as “both forming sympathetic and affectionate relationships with research participants and using friendship as a metaphor for a more harmonious type of interaction in the field” (2019: 417). Yet in arguing that “solidarity with abandon” leads to more insightful research, he also refers to anthropologists who “justify [friendship] as a tool for increasing knowledge,” a win-win approach that nevertheless conveys that the value of one’s research to one’s scholarly peers is the bottom line (Teitelbaum 2019: 418). In parallel with other forms of neoliberal reasoning, the promise of a connection that the ethnographer can feel good about—what is described in various periods as rapport, solidarity, or friendship—not only reinscribes a white, cisgendered, male subject as the universalized figure of the researcher (Appert 2017), but is valued simultaneously for its personal and professional benefits.

Moroccanists have often sought and theorized from more mutual forms of connection, producing reflexive analyses of scholars’ and research subjects’ inevitably unequal co-construction of a shared reality (e.g., Rabinow 1977; Crapanzano 1980; Dwyer and Muhammad 1982; Crawford and Newcomb 2013). Their insights shape this book in part because of those professional benefits—the authors’ conceptual innovations brought them high disciplinary recognition, leading to later scholars’ careful consideration of their work. Like other white ethnographers read as female, my attempts to follow canonical standards of relationship-building and “access” acquisition often ran up against local standards of propriety. At the least, this limited my own publicly judged belonging to certain networks of people and, at worst, imposed on my interlocutors my own tiresome insistence on reading gendered cross-cultural interactions as “neutral.”

In overlapping situations and time periods, I have been complicit with various projects at multiple scales. My interlocutors’ generous gifts of time, energy,

and expertise were colored by the specter of potential benefits from my whiteness, Americanness, and mobility. My inability to confer the opportunities practitioners imagined were accessible to me have caused pain and disappointment for them and for me, yet I continue to return to Morocco for research. I have also been complicit in my interlocutors' desires to represent themselves well toward potential connections at home or abroad. And as a Fulbright recipient, I participated in a broad post-9/11 enterprise in which the United States awarded funding to produce knowledge about targeted populations. None of these projects were undertaken in bad faith by me, or, to my knowledge, by those who made them possible. In fact, our good faith was necessary to their functioning. I not only perform a sincere interest in my interlocutors and their life chances, but believe in my own sincerity.

To accept this state of affairs, especially as I understood it better over time, is itself a kind of complicity with the powers of whiteness as sculpted by the United States' postwar hegemony. These powers were and are observable and concrete, historic and historicized, yet require continuous analysis before and during fieldwork in order for them to feel less than natural in the moment.<sup>38</sup> Complicity must be the word for my relationship with advantages that have been attached to my body, that I have lived with and relied on before I could identify them. It must be the word for advantages that I cannot fully remove myself from, but that I can choose to critique or to overlook as I prefer. At the same time, I argue throughout this book for a capacious understanding of complicity that enables analysis of how those on the flip side of social hierarchies—those who cannot fully remove themselves from their *disadvantages*—enact assumptions and ideals they share with the powerful even as they work to dismantle dominant structures.

Recent decolonial and antiracist scholarship, as well as histories of anthropology's ties to colonial ethnology, demonstrate that ethnography's ancestors maximized the privilege of knowing and imagining knowability—the privilege of declaring other people and worlds transparent to knowledge-making—claimed by whiteness itself. At the ends of most chapters I turn onto myself the same lens through which our writing asks us to view our interlocutors: as both unique individuals and representatives of groups, whether defined by themselves or by scholarly tradition. Following probing calls for reflection from Danielle Brown (2020), Denise Gill (2020), Dylan Robinson (2020), Deonte Harris (2022), Trevor Reed et al. (2023), and others, I offer my unresolved tensions in the hope that other ethnographers see themselves in my concerns.<sup>39</sup> Yet in one of the cul-de-sacs of complicity, efforts to avoid a heroic narrative where the fieldworker redistributes her “expert” knowledge, wisdom, and empathy to her students could be read as merely substituting different tropes of white self-discovery (wa Ngũgĩ 2021). My theoretical framework and argumentative moves in these passages resonate with perhaps futile attempts to “contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self” (Tuck and Yang 2012: 9).

Asking, then, if other practices of listening, acting, representing, or writing can render ethnography less extractive is also asking whether we can escape complicity. Within this question are several further considerations, including: Can (or should) ethnographic research by institutionally employed scholars be other than transactional in nature?<sup>40</sup> If not, what amount of “giving back” compensates for rendering Moroccans’ culture as a source of professional capital, as an object valued for its ability to produce value elsewhere or, more pointedly, its ability to act as a reflection of my own intellectual value? Or, to put it in Casablancon emcee Amine Snoop’s words, “How can you help us?” (personal conversation, May 9, 2018).

If this book adequately addresses any of these questions, it is unfortunately through, rather than despite, the structures of knowledge-making discussed above. The following chapters center urban youths and young adults rather than the traditionally favored subjects of Moroccanist ethnography in order to underscore that self-described “Westernized” Moroccan subjects are equally worthy of study on their own terms. In this, I follow H. Samy Alim’s vital insistence that hip hop artists are “critical interpreters of their own culture” who theorize through and about their craft (2006: 11). Yet each time I happily support a Moroccan artist by purchasing music, circulating their work, or connecting them to opportunities to perform, speak, or network, it becomes more clear that singular actions at the margins of an unequal market merely cement that market and its imbalances.

My information and authorial voice depend on typical ethnographic practice, forms of witnessing in the field, and on postethnographic consumption. In the latter, my research and relationships fruitfully inform the way I hear new music and interact with newer artists. Yet my persistent unease with social media and commercial releases as sources of information shows me how fully I have accepted an insistence on ontological difference between the knower and the known, a difference traditionally expressed in reports based on the knower’s continuous physical presence (Fabian [1983] 2014: 151, 177; Hammoudi and Borneman 2009: 260). As a partial response to this, throughout this book, the complicity-sincerity dyad focuses attention on the ways both I and my interlocutors are incentivized to perform in our respective contexts. I hope this undermines the separation I introduce by identifying as a researcher, as well as highlighting the continuing temptation to write in the image of my own concerns.

In developing this book’s framework, I act in what I believe to be solidarity with my interlocutors by taking seriously all of their impacts, big or small, intended or otherwise.<sup>41</sup> My goal is to undermine unexamined assumptions that certain subjects are legible only when they undertake certain actions, or are represented in certain ways (El Zein 2016: 98). However, succeeding at this goal would do little to upset the extractive nature of contemporary ethnography. Solidarity does not afford me the right to claim effects that do not occur or to project a future that may

not come to exist; it “neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict” (Tuck and Yang 2012: 3). It is, instead, a powerful imaginative force that, like the bedrock assumptions of complicity discourse, insists on excavating what we owe to each other and searching for ways to act within that debt.

## CHAPTER OUTLINES

Each chapter that follows unpacks how the twin tensions of complicity-sincerity and competition-solidary work together. Many of the interactions depicted throughout this book take place in Casablanca, Morocco’s economic center and the hub of hip hop practitioners’ social and musical networks since hip hop’s emergence at the end of the 1980s.

It is important to this book’s argument, my interlocutors, and me to avoid “allochronic” representations of Moroccan hip hop, in which music or people are depicted as static (Fabian [1983] 2014). I do this by refusing the use of the ethnographic present and by considering changes over short periods of time as part of recent history. Since the 1990s, hip hop studies has often legitimated itself within academia as a way to study racial, economic, and political inequalities that affect “youth.” While music scholars have crafted nuanced histories of US hip hop, Anglophone research into non-US hip hop communities’ musical or social histories *as* history is still limited. Many practical problems, including a lack of archival material or even agreement on what belongs in a community’s archive, can stand in the way of a more substantial historical focus. However, in terms of our work’s collective impact on readers, prioritizing the recent over the historic in global hip hop scholarship may inadvertently mimic representations of nonwhite subjects as “people without history” (Wolf 1982). In the worst case, “non-Western” hip hop artists’ work might serve to illustrate arguments that center US themes, issues, or readers. With this in mind, this book asserts the value of my interlocutors’ recollections and my own, building a partial, contestable picture of Moroccan hip hop’s history primarily through the experiences of its first generation.

In chapter 1, I describe a poetics of ambiguity that has accompanied Moroccan popular musics since the Years of Lead, the postindependence decades in which King Hassan II governed through fear, surveillance, and political violence. Today’s hip hop artists and fans inherit not only the lyrical tactics that protected the musicians of the 1960s and ’70s, but a tradition of ambiguous listening, in which one interprets opacity or omission in tune with one’s political affiliations. By listening for and with sincerity, practitioners adopt a holistic approach, in which a critique of everyday socioeconomic injustice can be heard as a critique of larger structures, policies, and policymakers. Yet by necessity, the same rhetorical and listening strategies also enable acquiescence, or political quietism.<sup>42</sup>

Chapter 2 introduces ways that, in striving to educate and empower their fans, the first generation of Moroccan hip hop artists advanced a theory of citizenship that accepts complicity with the state and its neoliberalizing goals. Artists simultaneously critiqued themselves, listeners' selves, and widespread inequalities, linking "individual mentalities" (Fr. *mentalité*, Ar. *'aqliyya*) to national policies. The preferred person one infers from these critiques no longer suffers under the internalized oppression of the previous generation, but instead embraces personal responsibility as a mode of freedom. In turn, this focus locates social change in the individual, deemphasizing collective political action and working with, not against, the reduced role of the state.

Chapter 3 explores how musicians built supportive institutions that took the form of competitions and how these helped to produce their understandings of the state/market nexus and of themselves as market actors. In the late 2000s, a boom in state-funded tournaments like L'Mouja encouraged the national adoption of specific styles and reinforced the state's control of popular culture and pathways into international markets. At the same time, practitioners continue to build solidarity through their own forms of competition for audiences, recognition, and physical and economic mobility.

In chapter 4, I explore another dimension of artists' sincere investment in social change: their practice of speaking about and for marginalized Moroccans. Through music videos, live performance, volunteerism, and youth workshops, artists from varied socioeconomic locations imagine rural, low-income, or politically disenfranchised youths as targets of concern and objects of governance. The success of Morocco's first emceeing workshop served to further institutionalize the hip hop arts and shift the discourse on poverty away from an emphasis on poor urban youths' religiosity. At the same time, nonprofits and individual musicians took up some of the goals and practices previously monopolized by state agencies.

Chapter 5 twists the angle of this argument to look at how hip hop artists and fans themselves are imagined, by the state and in global north settings, as a specific category of Moroccan: harbingers of Arabs' and Muslims' deferred modernity. To do this, I focus on how Casablancon emcee Soultana's career formed within an international market for representations of female Muslim resistance. The market analyzed here both expresses and stimulates demand for the visibility of women who appear to contradict orientalist conceptions of Arabness, Muslimness, and patriarchy. Navigating multiple representational puzzles, Soultana, her female colleagues, and I all struggle with enforced and self-reinforcing complicity.

Finally, the epilogue returns to the argument that under neoliberalism, complicit and sincere relations reinforce each other, as sincerity becomes both necessary and insufficient to leading an ethical life. I discuss how some younger practitioners have circulated beyond the nation in ways earlier artists could only imagine in the 2000s, provoking a subtle but important shift from discourses of cultivation to those of speculation. By considering the debates Moroccan trap



artists provoked among pioneering first-generation artists, I throw into relief the ways both waves are naturalized as neoliberal citizens, including the different ways both conflate one's self with one's present and future capital.

As a form born from and expressive of those left behind in postindustrial New York, transnational hip hop's embrace of the tensions I have outlined here—complicity and sincerity, competition and solidarity—serves to critique neoliberalism from the inside. As in Paul Gilroy's formulation of Black Atlantic modernity, hip hop contests anti-Blackness through its mastery of techniques and aesthetics vital to neoliberal subjectivity itself (1993: 73). While Moroccan hip hop's history differs markedly from that of 1970s South Bronx and Queens, its practitioners know that as people constantly reinscribed within "global" narratives as different and as constitutive of difference, their mastery is never apolitical.