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ARABIC HIP HOP AS AN INCARNATION OF THE MEDIEVAL ARABIC POETIC TRADITION

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Keywords: Arabic Hip Hop, Arabic Poetic Tradition, Genre Universalities, Prosodic Universalities

Introduction

On the verge of the 21st century, a musical genre called hip hop, emerged first among the inner-city African American population of New York, dynamically spread through the Arabic societies, especially among the youth due to its revolutionary character and its touching on social and political issues (cf. Devos 2007: 11-12).

To some extent, the development of Arabic hip hop (AHH) is related to the activity and especially terroristic actions of the Islamic extremist organizations in the west. These actions have their negative impact on the western societies where the term "Islam" started to be identified with terrorism and extremism (cf. Wright 2001: 120). As a consequence, a number of Arabic rappers have come out to describe their culture in their songs and show the western societies that extremist groups are as much harmful to the Muslims (cf. Moussly 2009).

The forerunners of AHH aimed at raising domestic social issues related to Islam, the Arabic and Islamic identities, tribal bonds and rivalry, and so forth. This branch has grown to adopt traditional characteristics, hence, it can be dubbed the Classical branch of AHH. Among the most significant representatives of this branch are the Emirati Salim and Abdallah Dahman brothers, known as "Desert Heat", the Saudi bands West Coast G'z, Ayal Makkah, etc.

Later, another branch of AHH has evolved to raise political issues rooted in the Arabic societies which are not openly discussed due to various reasons. This branch started its path from the activity of the Palestinian group DAM¹ and reached its peak at the Arab Spring, especially the Tunisian Jasmine revolution, when a Tunisian underground rapper Hamada Ben Amor, also known as El General, had a huge impact on the revolution with the release of his debut song "Mr. President" (cf. Peisner 2011). Due to its character this direction can be referred to as the Revolutionary branch of AHH.

The dynamic development and influence of hip hop on the Arabic societies both from social and political angles can be linked to the persistence of the Arabic poetic tradition (APT), which can be traced to centuries before the rise of Islam. As a matter of fact, some of the core components and practices of hip hop have their equivalents in APT. Due to its continuity; this tradition was engraved in the Arabic culture which made it possible for hip hop to impact the Arabic societies. It is argued that the influence was therefore bigger on societies where the traces of the poetic tradition were still apparent.

The genre universalities of APT and AHH

The different genres are categorized based on the repetition of the themes and them becoming periodical. This is manifested both in APT and AHH through the reflection of the inner state and the environment of the poet/rapper on their works (cf. Фильштинский 1985: 36, Dyson 2004: 61-62). Two of the most common genres that are used in APT and AHH are *praise* and *defamation* along with their sub-genres. These genres are used both in individual and group aspects.

In APT the genre of *praise* ($faxr^2$) is used in individual sense ($\S ax \S \bar{\imath}$) when the poet manifests his own merits, and in regard of the tribe ($qabal\bar{\imath}$) to highlight the privilege of the tribe of the poet over the rest of the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula (cf. Фильштинский 1985: 59-60). Among the most significant examples of praise can be found in the pre-Islamic odes (al-

¹ DAM, however, started its career by singing about social matters. Their first song of political content called "Who's the terrorist? (Mēn 'irhābiyy?)" was issued in 2002 as a consequence of the Second Intifada (cf. O'Keffe 2014a).

² The transcription alphabet used throughout the article is that of "Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics "(EALL)".

muʿallaqāt). The pre-Islamic poet ʿAntara bin Šaddād (d. 608) describes his path from slavery to heroic deeds:

[1] Yu-xbiru-ki man šahida-l-waqā'i'a 'anna-niyy

Aġšā-l-waġā wa-'a 'iffu 'inda-l-maġnami

Those who took part in the battles inform you that I

Participate in the battle and don't claim my part of the loot (al-'Anbārī 2003: 65, 67-68).

By highlighting his merits 'Antara claims that regardless of his background he is more courageous and heroic than the pure-blooded tribesmen.

Another pre-Islamic poet, Umru bin Kulthum (d. 584), praises his tribe, Taghlib, in his ode:

[2]... 'anna-na nūridu-r-rāyāti bayḍ-an

wa-nuşdiru-hunna ħumr-an qad ruwaynā [...]

... matā kun-nā li- 'ummi-ka muqtawīnā

We go to war with white flags

And return with red flags colored with the blood of the enemies [...]

... When have we been servants for your mother? (al-'Anbārī 2003: 75, 79).

Addressing the king of Hira, Umru bin Hind, the author of the ode marks the might and the nobleness of his tribe compared with the kingdom of Hira. In this kind of praise can be seen the tight connection between the poet and his tribe, a phenomenon that lies in the basis of the pre-Islamic tribal system of the Arabian Peninsula (cf. Фильштинский 1985: 147, 165).

Praise similarly plays an important role in AHH and hip hop as well. Arabic rappers sing about their merits and their superiority over the fellow rappers. Saudi rapper Muhammad al-Ghamidi, also known as Klash and the founder of the Saudi band West Coast G'z, sings about his qualities in his song "Take [the] words from me (*Xod mnē klām*)":

[3] Rābr al-xalīj al-'awwal agūl-ha w-galbiy muṭma'inn Fī-t-tilifizyōn wa-l-jarāyid tagra' 'anniy lakin Fōg kill illī smi'tū tarā-š-šuhra mā hammatnī

Mū 'anā jriyt warā-hā aš-šuhra hiya illī jat-nī

I say that I'm the number one rapper of the Gulf and I'm sure in it,

You can read about me in TV and newspapers, however,

Above all you see that I'm not interested in fame,

It's not me who chased it, it is fame that reached me (Klāš 2009).

One can defer from the song that according to Klash, he does not chase fame. Rather, it's his merits and qualities that make him famous in the Gulf and superior over the rest of the Gulf rappers.

The members of West Coast G'z are as well known for their songs dedicated to the band and the merits of its members. Sagr al-Awlagi, also known as Legend Killer (L.K.), praises his band for its merits:

[5] Mā tilga jīz zeyy al-west kōst jīz

Iħnā ahl al-ħanka wa-l-ħikma ... u-ramz at-ta ʿajīz

There are no other g'z like West Coast G'z,

We are the people of wisdom and experience ... and the symbol of victory. (West Coast G'z 2018a)

Legend Killer points the uniqueness of West Coast G'z in different aspects as well as its privilege over other, mainly the rival bands. This kind of connection between the rapper and his band resembles the medieval connection between the poet and his tribe (cf. example 2).

The second common genre between APT and AHH is *defamation*. In APT, this genre is used in two variations, invective $(hij\bar{a})$ and demeriting $(naq\bar{\imath}da)$. The former has minimal occurrences in AHH and is mostly traced in the Revolutionary branch. The latter, however, is about addressing satiric poems to the rival which are normally answered with similar poems. This type is more widely apparent in the Classical branch.

Initially, *invective* was identified with sorcery. However, its main purpose was to embolden the tribe by defaming its rivals (cf. Фильштинский 1985: 54). In APT there are several examples of poems that are entirely written in this sub-genre. Hassan bin Thabit's (d. 674) poem addressed to Abu Sufyan, for instance, is a classic example of invective:

[6] šahad-tu bi-hi (Muħammad-in) wa-qawm-iyy şaddaqū-hu Fa-qul-tum lā na-qūmu wa-lā na-šāʾu 'a-lā 'ubliġ 'Abā Sufyāna 'an-niyy

Fa-'anta mujawwaf-un naxb-un hawā'u

Me and my tribe have trusted and believed him (Muhammad)

But you said "we neither believe nor want to believe him"

Extend my words to 'Abū Sufyān

That he's a coward and he's empty like a drum. (Hassān bin Tābit 1994: 20)

The medieval invectives, along with defaming the rivals, contain elements of praise of the poet's tribe, individuals, or concepts, such as the prophet Muhammad and Islam in this particular example. Therefore, the goal of this sub-genre is highlighting personal merits by means of defaming rivals.

The occurrence of invective in AHH is fractional and does not include entire compositions. Some of the songs of the Revolutionary branch, for instance, include elements of invective, however, they're written in other genres:

> [8] Habbeit n-waḍḍiħ ħāža le-l-kelb we-l-kāfir raʾīs tūnis Mā na-tšarraf-š ħattā b-ēš na-ħkī ʿalā ism-ō

I wanted to make something clear to the dog, the infidel who's the president of Tunisia.

I won't even give him the honor of saying his name (O'Keffe 2014b).

Tunisian rapper Guito'n's song "Yo, Extremist!" addressed to the president of Tunisia is claimed to be the first anti-Al Qaeda song in AHH. The rapper defames the president by likening him to a dog and an infidel³ for his vain promises of liberating the Tunisian combatants in Syria, which is similar to the medieval invectives (O'Keffe 2014b).

_

himself.

³ The above-mentioned lines are taken the introduction of the song's music video where a masked combatant records a video of himself addressed to the president of Tunisia. Later in the same song Guito'n claims that the Tunisian nation has been Muslim for 13 centuries, no matter what they did, and comforts the Tunisian combatants in Syria saying that soon the country will be liberated and the Sharia law will be implemented (Guito'n 2013). That the rapper's calling the president a dog and an infidel denotes the latter's low status from the angle of the religion compared with the Tunisian nation, the combatants, and the rapper

Demeriting is the second common sub-genre of APT and AHH. It emerged as a separate genre at the reign of the Umayyad Caliphate by court poets fighting for the patronage of caliphs. One of the most famous fights occurred between court poets, al-Farazdaq (d. 732) and Jarir (d. 728) (cf. Фильштинский 1985: 164, 165, 169-188):

[9] 'inna-l-ladī samaka-s-samā' banā la-nā bait-an da'ā'imu hu 'a'azzu wa-aṭwalu

Bait-an zurārat-an muħtab-in bi-fanā'i-hi wa-mujāši' wa-'abū-l-fawārisi nahšalu

Lā ya-ħtabī bi-fanā'i baiti-ka miŧla-hum 'abad-an 'iḏā 'adda-l-fa'ālu-l- 'afḍalu

God who built the sky has built us an honor house (a tribe) with high and long pillars (well established name)

Within its court, Mohtab, Majashia, and the "master of knights" Nahshal reside (the ancestors of the tribe)

Of whom no equivalent would reside in your house of virtues (al-Farazdaq 1987: 489).

To which follows Jarir's demeriting poem:

[10] 'axzā al-ladī sama-ka-s-samā mujāši '-an wa-banā binā 'a-ka fī-l-ħaḍiḍi-l- 'asfali

Bait-an yu-ħamħimu qiyana-kum bi-fanāiʾ-hi danas-an maqāʿiduhu xabītu-l-madxali

Who has built the sky disgraced Majashia' and built your house in the rock-bottom

A filth house with singers mumbling in its court. Dirty seats (Jarīr 1986: 357).

One can notice that the content of the poems is in the same theme which is a poetic trick that shows the wittiness of poets. As important as demeriting the rival, this sub-genre is also used to demonstrate the abilities of the poets.

The medieval practice of demeriting is similar to a practice called "diss" in hip hop. The roots of this practice are found in the Afro-

.

⁴ The short form of the word "disrespect" (see https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=diss 19/06/1019).

American ritual called "the Dozens", practiced decades before the emergence of hip hop. In the scientific literature it's defined as "... a black male form of "ritual insult," a verbal contest involving any number of young black men who compete by talking about each other's mama" (Kelly 2004: 127). In hip hop it's an insulting song addressed to rivals, who, in return, answer with a similar song.

In AHH diss is mainly practiced in the Classical branch where it has gained a traditional flavor and got fused with local colors. Disses start from a specific topic or an event related to a rival and are more common for bands than individual rappers. Among the most famous practices of disses in AHH is the long-lasted battle between West Coast G'z and the band of Wakr al-Usfur (cf. Ar-rāb al-'Arabiyy 2017). The following lines are from one of Wakr al-Usfur's disses:

[11] Yā Klāš yā bnu-l-xadamiyya // Isma min-niyy dī-l- uġniyya W-anta fākir yōm ad-durra // darabōk šātōk alā barra Klash, you son of a servant // Listen this song from me While you were thinking on the day of the fight // they beat you and threw you out (Wakr al- Uṣfūr 2010)

To which Klash answers:

[12] Klāš al- 'amm // Yi-sakkir koll famm
Yadūs 'alā wakr al- 'oṣfōr u-mā yi-htamm
Aywa walad gabāyil anā walad ħawārī
U-antō ṭurūš 'aṭla 'ū min diyārī
Uncle Klash // closes every mouth
Disses Wakr al- 'Uṣfūr and does not care
Yes, I'm a son of tribe and I appreciate friendship
And you are trespassing, leave my country (Klāš 2010).

Similar to the battle between Jarir and al-Farazdaq, contemporary rappers mainly try to show their poetic skills and creativeness by means of demeriting the rivals. Klash refereeing to himself as being a son of a tribe confirms that in the traditional Arabic societies there's still a connection between rappers and the tribe they belong to. Moreover, it gives the rapper a base to boast.

The prosodic universalities of APT and AHH

The prosodic character of a poem roughly depends on two factors, measure and rhyme. Both of them lead to the rhythmic perfection of the poem and are defined for a line of poetry, bait (pl. buyūt) in APT, and bar in AHH or hip hop, generally. In APT each line consists of minimal combinations of two-letter (sabab, pl. 'asbāb) and three-letter (watad, pl. 'awtād) syllables, which merge to comprise prosodic formulas, tafā 'īl (sg. taf 'īla) (cf. Санчес 1968: 87-88). The limited possible alterations of prosodic formulas in a line comprise 16 prosodic measures recorded by al-Khalīl bin Ahmad al-Farahīdiyy (d. 791) (cf. Фильштинский 1985: 51). In AHH measures depend on the flow of the bar and the delivery of the rapper, therefore, they are personal for each rapper and unlimited in number (cf. Connor).

Rhyme, on the other hand, is the correspondence of sounds of final syllables. In APT and AHH similarly, the final syllable is a combination of a letter (ħarf) and the vowel that it bears (ħaraka), known as a prosodeme (cf. Карабекян 2001: 3-13). In APT a line of poetry is composed of two hemistichs, forepart (şadr) and rear (ʿajz). Generally, the rhyme falls on the last syllable of the rear and is uniform throughout the whole poem. That is why the poems of APT are more commonly titled by the rhyming letter (e.g. "mīmiyya", "lāmiyya", etc.) (cf. Фильштинский 1985: 53). In AHH the rhymes generally fall on the last syllable of a bar. However, unlike APT, they are periodically altered and diverse.

Along with the regular characteristics of the prosodic system of APT and AHH, there are some exceptional cases that make the prosodic structure of a poem more complex. Among them are *internal rhymes* and *multisyllabic rhyming*.

Internal rhymes denote the case when certain syllables in a line rhyme with the final syllable or when certain syllables in different lines rhyme. In APT this phenomenon is tracked in the first practice and is called $ta\bar{s}r\bar{t}$, where the rhyme of the forepart is identical with the rhyme of the rear (Mahfouz 2009 IV: 87 from Stoetzer 1989: 63). Examples of this type of rhyming are found in the works of *al-Mutanabbī* (d. 915):

[13] 'alā qadri-l-'ahli-l-'azmi ta'tī-l-'azā'i \underline{mu}

Wa- ta'tī 'alā qadri-l-kirāmi-l-mukārimu

Strong resolves come in proportion to men of determination,

And noble deeds come in proportion to magnanimous men (Al-Mutanabbī 1983: 385).

In AHH internal rhymes are found both in the same line and in different lines:

[14] *kull 'āgil <u>yu-ħāwil</u> yi-ħsan li-nafsi-hi-d-dikar u-min jahli-ka <u>tu-hawī</u> bi-nafsi-ka fī hāwiyya min gul-i-l-fikar Every clever person tries to make their memory better,*

But from your ignorance you fall the pit that you dig (West Coast G'z 2018b)

In this example the underlined syllables are samples of rhyming in different lines.

[15] Rāyes le-<u>blēd</u> ša ʿabak <u>mēt</u> bi-rišat <u>ʿabēd</u> min ez-zubala <u>aklēt</u>

Mr. President, your people are dead. They eat from the garbage (El General 2010)

In this example certain syllables in the line are identical with the final syllable.

Multisyllabic rhyming, on the other hand, is a phenomenon, where instead of the usual single-syllable rhyming two or more final syllables are identical (cf. Edwards 2009: 87). This practice is widely used in AHH and generally in the Classical branch. What about APT, it's a rare practice and its best sample is Abu-l-Alaa al-Maarri's (d. 1057) divan called *Luzūmiyyāt*, entirely written in multisyllabic rhyming (cf. Gibb 1984: V – 931):

[16] Ka'anna-ka ba'da xamsīna staqalat li-mawlidi-ka al-binā'u dunā li-ya<u>hwī</u>

Wa-'inna-ka 'in tazawwaj binta 'ašrinli-'axību şafaqat-an min šaixi ma<u>hwi</u>

As you are passing the fifty years of age the building is soon going to fall

And if you marry a young girl, then it's a worse deal than that of Mahw's old man (al-Ma'arrī 1885: 342).

Al-Maarri uses every potential alteration of prosodems to get as many samples as possible. In this example multisyllabic rhyming is expressed in the two final syllables of the lines, a voiceless /h/ and a voiced /w/.

In AHH multisyllabic rhyming is expressed both with multiple syllables of a single word and with different words. West Coast G'z' songs include both of the examples:

[17] dāyman 'awja' bi-l-kalām u-disātī t-zīd al-wāji'a 'aħabb itfannan fī-hā u-uxallī-hā 'alei-him fāji'a
I always hurt them with my words and my disses are painful
I love intensifying them (i.e. disses) to destroy them (i.e. rivals) with them (West Coast G'z 2018b)

In this example multisyllabic rhyming is expressed in the final voiced /j/ and /'/.

[18] w-illī yi-faḍḍilu-ṭ-ṭarāwa u-yi-bgā ya-ʿīš ʿīšat dawājin Fa-ʿinda-nā dawā-hom ... dawā bašar u-dawā jinn

Whoever prefer and seeks easy living, lives a life of domestic animals,

We have medicine for them \dots worth for humans and jinns (West Coast G'z 2018a).

While in this example it is expressed in approximate rhyming of separate words⁵.

Conclusions

The comparative analysis of APT and AHH made it possible to track mutual practices in their genre system and prosody. The genre universalities are tracked in two of the main genres of APT and AHH, praise, together with its sub-genres individual and group praise, and defamation, accordingly with its sub-genres invective and demeriting. The prosodic universalities, on the other hand, can be tracked in exceptional rhyming cases, internal rhymes and multisyllabic rhyming.

From the two branches of AHH, Classical and Revolutionary ones, the former uses the above-mentioned universalities more widely than the latter,

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⁵ Even though in this example they sound almost identically (*dawājin/dawā jinn*).

which is a result of the presence of the medieval traditional practices in some of the contemporary Arabic societies.

Due to being engraved in the language logic of those societies, the characteristics of the medieval APT re-emerged in a contemporary musical genre, hip hop, and complied it to suit its standards. Based on this, it is safe to conclude that the Classical branch of AHH can be considered a continuation and a contemporary equivalent of the medieval APT.

ԱՐԱԲԱԿԱՆ ՀԻՓ ՀՈՓԸ՝ ՈՐՊԵՍ ՄԻՋՆԱԴԱՐՅԱՆ ԱՐԱԲԱԿԱՆ ԲԱՆԱՍՏԵՂԾԱԿԱՆ ԱՎԱՆԴՈՒՅԹԻ ՄԱՐՄՆԱՎՈՐՈՒՄ

Ամփոփում

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Բանալի բառեր՝ արաբական հիփ հոփ, արաբական բանաստեղծական ավանդույթ, ժանրային ընդհանրություններ, տաղաչափական ընդհանրություններ

Հոդվածի նպատակն է արաբական բանաստեղծական ավանդույթի և արաբական հիփ հոփի մի շարք հենքային բաղադրիչների համադրական ուսումնասիրության շնորհիվ ցույց տալ արաբական հիփ հոփի՝ արաբական բանաստեղծական ավանդույթի ժամանակակից համարժեք լինելը։ Բանաստեղծական կայուն կառուցվածքով բնորոշվող արաբական բանաստեղծական ավանդույթը՝ ձնավորված իսլամի ծագումից դեռևս դարեր առաջ, շարունակական կերպով հասել է մեր օրերը՝ ամրագրվելով արաբական լեզվամտածողության մեջ։ Նախորդ դարավերջին արաբական միջավայր մուտք գործած հիփ հոփ անվամբ հայտնի երաժշտական ժանրը, որին նույնպես բնորոշ է բանաստեղծական կայուն կառուցվածքը, դինամիկ կերպով

յուրացվում է նոր միջավայրի կողմից՝ հարմարվելով վերջինիս մշակութային երանգներին։ Արաբական բանաստեղծական ավանդույթի և արաբական հիփ հոփի ժանրային և տաղաչափական համընկումները թույլ են տալիս ենթադրելու, որ հիփ հոփն արաբական միջավայրում զարգացել է որպես արաբական բանաստեղծական ավանդույթի շարունակություն և ժամանակակից համարժեք։

АРАБСКИЙ ХИП ХОП КАК ВОПЛОЩЕНИЕ СРЕДНЕВЕКОВОЙ АРАБСКОЙ ПОЭТИЧЕСКИЙ ТРАДИЦИИ

Резюме

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Ключевые слова: арабский хип хоп, арабская поэтическая традиция, жанровые универсалии, просодические универсалии

данной статьи состоит в том, чтобы с помощью ∐ель сравнительного изучения некоторых основных компонентов арабской поэтической традиции и арабского хип хопа показать, что последний является современным эквивалентом арабской поэтической традиции. Арабской поэтической традиции, основанной за несколько столетий до возникновения ислама, присуща чёткая поэтическая структура. Она непрерывным образом дошла до наших дней, таким образом укрепляясь в арабском языковом мышлении. В конце 20-го века музыкальный жанр "хип хоп", для которого тоже характерна чёткая поэтическая структура, проник в арабскую среду и динамичным образом ассимилировался в новой среде, приспосабливаясь к её культурному колориту. Жанровые и просодические сходства арабской поэтической традиции и арабского хип хопа позволяют предположить, что хип хоп в арабской среде развился как продолжение и современный эквивалент арабской поэтической традиции.

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