Araştırma Makalesi ● Research Article

Representations of Rap Music in Cinema: Forms of Resistance and Reconciliation in *Casablanca Beats*

Sinemada Rap Müziğin Temsilleri: Kazablanka Ritimleri Filminde Direniş ve Uzlaşı Biçimleri

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MAKALE BİLGİSİ

ÖZ

Sinema, toplumsal dönüşümün aktörleri olan gruplarla etkileşim kuran ve toplumsal gerçeklik ile yakından bağlantılı bir sanattır. Baskın kültürler içerisinde sesini duyuramayan gruplar altkültürler aracılığıyla kendilerine alternatif bir alan açarak baskın kültüre karşı bir direniş geliştirebilmekte veya onunla uzlaşma yoluna gidebilmektedir. Dolayısıyla, altkültürler her ne kadar bir direniş biçimi gibi algılansa da bazen toplumla uzlaşma yolunda işlevsel olabilmektedir. Alternatif bir ifade biçimi olarak altkültürler birçok farklı ülkede üretilen son dönem filmlerde kendisine bir temsil alanı bulabilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, rap alt-kültürünün sinemada nasıl temsil edildiği incelenmektedir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, Fas Sineması'nın son yıllarda dikkat çeken örneklerinden biri olan *Kazablanka Ritimleri* (Ayouch, 2021) filmi Kasıtlı Örneklem yoluyla seçilmiştir. *Kazablanka Ritimleri'*nde (Ayouch, 2021) genç karakterler arasında dinamik bir rap alt kültürünün ortaya çıkışı ve bu yol ile gençlerin kendilerine bir kaçış hattı oluşturarak normatif değerlere karşı bir faillik oluşturmaları ele alınmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, rap müzik alt-kültürel pratiklerin *Kazablanka Ritimleri* (Ayouch, 2021) adlı filme nasıl yansıdığı, Raymond Williams'ın "egemen", "kalıntısal" ve "doğmakta olan" tanımlamalarıyla ele aldığı kültür çerçevesinin rehberliğinde Betimsel Analiz yöntemi kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın sonucunda, ilgili filmde genç karakterlerin alt kültürel pratikleri yoluyla özerk bir ifade alanı buldukları, grup aidiyeti oluşturdukları, toplumsal belirlenimlere meydan okudukları ancak diğer taraftan ise baskın kültürü dönüştürerek onunla bir uzlaşma çabasına girdikleri saptanmıştır.

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ABSTRACT

Cinema is an art connected to social reality, interacting with groups that are actors of societal transformation. Groups that cannot make their voices heard within dominant cultures can develop a resistance against the dominant culture or find a path of reconciliation with it through subcultures, thereby creating an alternative space for themselves. Therefore, although subcultures are often perceived as a form of resistance, they can sometimes be functional in the path towards reconciliation with society. As an alternative form of expression, subcultures can find an opportunity of representation in recent films produced in many different countries. This study examines how rap subculture is represented in cinema. With this aim in mind, the film *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021), which is one of the noteworthy examples of Moroccan cinema in recent years, has been selected as an example. *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021) addresses the emergence of a dynamic rap subculture among young characters, and how through this path, they create a lifeline for themselves by forming a resistance against normative values. In this study, the reflection of rap music subcultural practices in *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021) is examined using the Descriptive Analysis method guided by Raymond Williams' framework of the "dominant", "residual", and "emerging" cultures. The results of the study reveal that in the film, young characters find a space of autonomous expression through subcultural practices, form group identities, challenge societal determinants, but on the other hand, they are also observed to engage in efforts to reconcile with the dominant culture by transforming it.

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Introduction

Cinema has a close relationship with reality and this relationship manifests itself in various ways. Films can make the viewer see the world from different angles by disclosing reality. As Kracauer (1960, p. xlix) famously states "*films come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality. Now this reality includes many phenomena which would hardly be perceived were it not for the motion picture camera's ability to catch them on the wing*". Therefore, cinema presents images of countless realities including different cultures, times and experiences. By situating these images before the gaze of the audience, cinema creates an awareness on the subjects that are sometimes ignored by social agents.

Subcultures can be counted as one of these realities which are sometimes overlooked and on many occasions deliberately marginalized. Basically defined as "*an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group exhibiting characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture or society*" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.), the term subculture is characterized by being a small entity within a larger community. This definition assumes the existence of two sides, hence situating subcultures in a dichotomy with the society and the meanings it creates. In other words, subculture is a social issue that can be examined within a social context as well as a cultural context. They are often regarded as forms of resistance against the social and cultural norms. Hebdige (2002, p. 90) highlights the potentiality of subcultures to represent an "*interfrence in the orderly sequence*" and a kind of "*anarchy*" in the social sphere. This identification is primarily concerned with the symbolic meaning of the term in the social realm. The marginalized image of the subcultures causes them to be regarded as "*a…mechanism of semantic disorder*". This means that the counter characteristics of the subcultures stem from the perception of the majority. On the other hand, subcultures often have positive effects on their members. Subcultures, in the opinion of Willis (1990), are important in helping group members figure out who they are and how to go about building an identity. These groups can help mold a person's transition into adulthood because there is no one "complete" or unified culture to cling to, and thus no pre-established values or role models to follow (as cited in Macdonald, 2001, p. 180). From this perspective, subcultures become a space for empowerment and reconciliation.

As a subcultural formation, rap music is practiced in many parts of the world and it is widely represented in cinema. Like many other subcultural activities, rapping is widely associated with deviance and delinquency. Upon considering the cinematic representations of this dichotomy, it is observed that the clash between rap subculture and society is, in fact, the result of society's determinative gaze upon the rap subculture.

This study investigates the rap music subculture, concentrating on the representation of the genre in cinema. The main objective of the study is to examine how the film *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021) makes use of cinematic devices to characterize this cultural phenomenon and explain how the realms of social and subcultural rap spheres interact. Since the study adheres to a realistic approach to cinema, the film was chosen purposefully for its realistic claim. A literature review has initially been undertaken on the frameworks of cultural theory and rap subculture, then a descriptive analysis has been conducted in order to trace the portrayal of rap subculture in the sample film. Within the framework of descriptive analysis, this study endeavors to investigate whether the portrayal of the rap subculture aligns with the societal perception of resistance, or if it reflects a theme of reconciliation seeking a middle ground between the practitioners and the society.

Contextual Framework

Theorizing Subcultures

The word "culture" has been used historically in a variety of contexts and with differing meanings. Its various interpretations frequently lead to paradoxes or conflicts. This ambiguity results from the fact that culture is a broad category that includes a wide range of human behaviors, viewpoints, and values, which has led to changing uses and interpretations of the term over time. These interpretations lead to so many definitions of the term that Raymond Williams (1983, p. 87) famously declares culture as "*one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language*" because the term has been employed by numerous disciplines and research areas. Yet, Williams (1960, p. xvi) conceptualizes the term "culture" in an historical account and defines it in four particular definitions: the practice of art, a collection of moral and intellectual endeavors, an entire way of life and a state or habit of the mind. Culture, in the context of these definitions, encompasses the individual experience and the collective encounters as well as the practice and perception of arts. In the discourse of cultural studies, culture is often conceptualized as a comprehensive way of life, similar to language, shaped by representations, utilized as a tool, embodied in practices and artifacts, organized spatially, imbued with power dynamics, classified as high or low culture, and recognized in mass and popular forms (Barker, 2004, p. 44). More illustrative definitions are also made by researchers. Matsumoto and Luang (2003, p. 27) defines culture as "*The set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next*". Likewise, Spencer-Oatey (2008, p. 3) specifies culture as the shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors of a community that shape its members' perceptions and actions around them.

Building on these definitions, it might be suggested that culture constitutes an umbrella term comprising of a multitude of concepts, meanings and subcategories. The term "subculture" is often uttered among these subcategories. Within the context of a "subculture," the term "culture" typically refers to a comprehensive way of life or systems of understanding that aid members in making sense of the outside world. The prefix "sub" conveys concepts of individuality and departure from the mainstream. Thus, people who adhere to particular norms and values that are distinct from those of the prevailing society constitute a subculture (Barker, 2004, p. 193). Hebdige (2002, p. 2) basically conceptualizes subcultures as "*the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups*". In this definition, a dualism immediately catches the eye; the mainstream which is the dominant entity vs. the alternative which is a smaller constitution.

The dichotomy between the dominant and the subordinate is regarded in different contexts by different research disciplines of culture. The University of Chicago is known for being one of the most influential schools which produced the first theories on urban sociology as well as culture. Also known as the Chicago School, the center focused its attention on urbanization and the social transformation process it brought about from the industrialization period to the 20th century. In its earlier stages in the 1920s, noteworthy scholars such as Park and Burgess regarded urban landscape as an active, living organism. Numerous encounters take place in this social realm and new dynamics are continuously produced. This rapid change distrupts the social control mechanisms which creates disorganized formations. Therefore, a tense relationship between the dominant social structure and subordinate formations builds up which leads to a negative point of view towards the subcultures. For early Chicago School representatives, a subculture was employed to characterize a group of delinquent or criminal individuals that authorities sought to halt or rehabilitate. The traces of this point of view can still be observed in some studies (Haenfler, 2014, p. 4). More noteworthy scholars in the Chicago School such as Blumer, Hughes and Becker explore the potential of the individual to

build a self in a social context (Smith, 1988, p. 145-146). They interrogate how social structures and the external environment, as opposed to a person's genetic makeup or personal characteristics, affect people's behaviors and perceptions of the social sphere around them. According to this viewpoint, social and environmental structures significantly influence behavior, placing more emphasis on the effects of the outside impacts than on innate traits (Hall, 2009, p. 4918). In general, the Chicago School's understanding of culture was dynamic, focusing on the interactions that occur in urban settings between people, groups, and their surroundings. They viewed culture as the result of social interactions, historical contexts, and spatial arrangements in an urban setting.

Another school producing thought on the issue of culture is The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), which is informally referred to as the Birmingham School, located at the University of Birmingham. CCCS primarily put emphasis on the intersection between culture, particularly popular culture and subcultures, and hegemony. Founded in 1964 by Richard Hoggart and proceeded to operate under the supervision of Stuart Hall until 1988, CCCS investigated a wide range of subjects including the authoritarian state, youth subcultures, gender, race, and the media. The principal concentration of CCCS was shaped by the leftist approach of its representatives. Highly influenced by Marxist and Gramscian thinking that drew attention to the hegemonic practices of the authority on the working class, CCCS produced works on the "*lived experiences*" of the subordinate groups (Barker, 2007, p. 298). CCCS researchers tried to reveal the hegemonic relationships created and recreated in the cultural environment; however, unlike the Chicago School, they concentrated on the cultural practices of subordinate groups as a form of resistance against the mainstream culture. Hoggart's highly-acclaimed book *The Uses of Literacy* (1960) can be shown as an example to this view. The book explores the changing cultural dynamics and everyday life experiences of the British working class. It also examines the youth subcultures that arose in the 1950s and how media consumption affected them. The book highlights how youth subcultures were a component of resistance by concentrating on the social and cultural experiences of the working class. Hoggart demonstrates how a new youth identity and culture were formed as a result of the media and consumer culture challenging traditional working-class values. Along with Hoggart, CCCS scholars prioritized the subcultural practices and their symbolic meanings against the dominant culture. For example, in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (2002), Hebdige examines the ways in which subcultures express meaning through symbols, attitudes, music, and art in addition to how they look and dress. According to Hebdige, subcultures frequently question society's accepted norms and as a result, forge their own identities and meanings. Through punk culture in particular, the book illustrates how subcultures can serve as a forum for resistance and creativity. The opposition and defiance of youth subcultures toward prevailing social norms is symbolized by punk music, fashion, and attitudes. According to Hebdige, subcultures are a type of "counterculture" that rebel against the established social order and are typically formed by members of socially marginalized groups. It is worth mentioning at this point that Hebdige (2002, p. 74) bases this duality of dominant cultural and social structures and subcultures on the changing lived experiences of people from different economical backgrounds. Although there has been a certain improvement in the spending power of the working class in Britain after the World War II, the class division has been reluctant to disappear. In fact, some time-dependent changes such as the emergence of mass media, the changes in the family structure and the organization of the school, work and leisure has had an undeniable impact on how the class divisions are perceived. By virtue of these changes, the awareness of class distinctions hasn't vanished; it has actually deepened even further. The emergence of subcultures can be seen as a part of this polarized social realm.

Another way of understanding subcultures within the CCCS is offered by Murdock and Brake who, in similar discourses, state that subcultures are the meaning systems and ways of expressing oneself that groups within specific social structures develop as a result of their shared struggles to reconcile the inconsistencies of their social circumstances. Subcultures are attempts to address issues that are experienced collectively and result from inconsistencies in the social structure. They also provide a collective identity that can be used to create an individual identity that is distinct from that which is determined by factors such as class, education, and occupation (as cited in Calluori, 1985, p. 44-45). According to this point of view, subcultures function as a kind of counter entity that builds a sphere for the subordinate to survive, so it can be read as a strategy to sustain their lives. Brake sees the space of subculture as a third territory where the members can feel free of the social norms and the control of the authority. In this free space, they can practice their identity without restraint. McRobbie acknowledges the liberating function of the subcultures by seeing the members as "*active agents whose sense of self is projected on to and expressed in an expansive range of cultural practices*" (as cited in Macdonald, 2001, p. 180). According to this view, the subcultural existence doesn't mean a total distinction from the mainstream culture; it is an alternative space that helps especially young people determine who they are and explore their identities. Therefore, subcultures may be observed as a tool for empowerment rather than a seclusion from the outside world.

In line with the empowering function of the subcultures, the classical counter position of subcultures may easily be perceived as a reconciliation between the dominant and the subordinate with Raymond Williams' concepts "residual", "dominant" and "emergent" cultures. Residual culture is about the collective behaviors, practices or attitudes that are passed from the older generations and they are usually about belief systems. Secondly, the term "dominant culture" refers to a culture consisting of cultural norms, values, beliefs and practices that are adopted and accepted by large segments of the recent society. This culture is often determined, guided and propagated by powerful groups, institutions or elites in the society. Dominant culture is a reflection of the dominant forces, ideologies and structures in the society (Williams, 1990, p. 98). Lastly, Raymond Williams' concept of "emergent culture" refers to new and emerging cultural elements from within the society in addition to the dominant culture. Williams does not limit culture only to the dominant one, but also takes into account the emerging, developing and changing cultural elements rising from different segments of the society. These emergent cultures are often ignored or suppressed by the dominant culture, but they gain strength and acceptance over time. These new and emerging cultural elements are often a reflection of social change and begin to spread among large segments of the society (Williams, 1990, p. 99). Residual, dominant, and emergent cultures are not distinct categories that exist side by side never coinciding and reconciling with each other. On the contrary, they are constantly intertwining, interacting and influencing one another. When we apply Williams' triad of culture to the dichotomy between the mainstream culture and the subcultures, it may be deduced that these seemingly countering concepts actually exist within each other. This inference suggests that subcultures are not only forms of resistance, they are also mediators or reconciliators between the clashing groups in the society.

Rap Subculture and Its Representation in Mainstream Cinema

Rap music is known for being the musical expression of the broader hip-hop culture characterized by spoken word poetry, hip-hop dance and visual arts such as graffiti and painting. Rap as a music genre heavily relies on oral performance and storytelling which can be found historically in some components of African culture (Price-Styles, 2015, p. 11). As an extension to the music, hip-hop dance presents a movement that is "*central rather than peripheral to the culture*". Along with the music, hip-hop dance encompasses an important form of expression

conveying meanings of social and economic exclusion, processes of marginalization and dominant gender roles (Johnson, 2015, p. 30). Graffiti, on the other hand, is a visual art form that embraces writing or painting stylized letters often on the walls of public spaces like subway systems (Miller, 2015, p. 32). It is clear that rap music is surrounded by hip-hop culture and its elements since the beginnings. Rap is practiced alongside the core elements of hip-hop culture, serving as a medium for self-expression through a diverse range of components. To decipher the subcultural practices of this particular music genre, it is crucial to initially examine the historical development of it.

Rap was originated in the South Bronx area of New York City in the 1970s. The emergence of rap music was closely related to the socio-economic conditions of the region. Characterized by a predominantly African-American and Hispanic population (ICIS, 2009), South Bronx experienced a period of social, economic, and infrastructural decline in the 1970s, resulting in a substantial transformation of the area. The area was marked by deserted buildings and empty streets, having lost thirty percent of its population and thirty-six percent of its housing stock. More than 80,000 empty housing units by the 1980s demonstrated urban decay (Chronopoulos, 2017, p. 935). Rap music flourished in impoverished, abandoned, burned-out or deteriorating structures of South Bronx (Swanson, 2010). Therefore, the meanings of being in the streets of the urban areas constitute the primary concern of rap music.

The information regarding the originating conditions of rap music highlights its unique and separate existence from mainstream cultural products. Rap is seen as an African American art form that embodies disobedience and rebellion. It produces a distinctive sound by reconstructing already-existing sounds, images, and technologies into a new artistic medium. Rap's rebellious essence comes from its roots in a history of diasporic creative expression (Negus, 1999, p. 84). However, rap subculture cannot be reduced to a resistance ground because it is practiced by a wide range of people which makes it a multifaceted issue. Though it was originally associated with subordinate groups with limited economic means, it is now a significant part of a large, mainstream commercial domain (Guthrie P. Ramsey, 2003, p. 164). However, the economic transformation of rap music should not be regarded as a clean-cut shift. Different facets of rap music co-exist in different settings. For example, it may be an opportunity for freedom of speech in a constraining realm. In an interview, rapper JT the Bigga Figga declares that "*The rap come from the voice of the ghetto . . . Hip Hop and the streets…is one, you might as well say that . . . Straight from the streets*" (as cited in Alim, 2006, p. 1). Besides being a resistance, it is a way to speak out within one's own circumstances. Practitioners of rap music may express their economic, social or ethnic background, identity, experiences and life circumstances in their own production of style (Huq, 2006, p. 110).

Although the initial discourse on rap music is mostly associated with African-Americans, it is now a global issue. Many artists from around the world, regardless of their ethnic background, can practice this style of music. Therefore, rap music has come to reflect many different realities and themes in various settings. In the USA, rap music is mostly famed for its ganster themes which accentuate violence and ghetto life. It is a musical representation of "*ghettocentricity*" with an emphasis on the black ghetto underclass. While other forms of rap document the *black* experience in a more general way, gangsta rap focuses on black urban street life. This subgenre is thought to provide a unique portrayal of the realities of the ghetto and an insider's view into black urban street life. However, it is mostly criticized because of relying heavily on the themes of crime and violence (Kubrin, 2005, p. 361). Despite certain negative aspects, gangsta rap offers an unvarnished perspective on the shortcomings of social services and government aid programs, shedding light on the harsh realities of inner-city life. It also draws attention to the ongoing problems like racial profiling, police brutality, and legal system shortcomings. In this way, the ferocious demands for justice and equality that its early pioneers

made are preserved in gangsta rap (Price, 2006, p. 61). On the other hand, it is generally accepted that American themes had an impact on the globalization of rap music especially in the earlier stages until the local discourses reaches authenticity. Local rappers in different countries gradually found their voice and they interpreted American influences in a way unique to the area. Rap has been used by local artists as a platform to address social, political and cultural issues in their home countries. In this way, rap music has been adopted in countries outside the US, gaining a unique identity and becoming a global voice (Warner, 2004, p. 164). From this standpoint, rap music seems to be ontologically tied to the social reality in which the performers find a place for themselves to express their circumstances of being.

Rap music, as an American-born music genre, has been featured as the main theme in some American films and also in other global samples. It is observed that the respresentation of rap music in American cinema draws parallels to the themes of social injustice, poverty, reaching fame and economic power, street culture, love, etc. which mostly coincide with the rap music discourse. The movie *8 Mile*, directed by Curtis Hanson, serves as a good illustration of the representation of rap music in American cinema. The film *8 Mile* (Hanson, 2002), which features autobiographical aspects from world-famous rapper Eminem, takes place in a destitute and unstable area of Detroit. Rabbit, the protagonist, is a young man trying to use his rapping talent to advance in life. The main character is portrayed as a white working-class man who lives in a neighborhood where most of the residents are black. Growing up in a low-income household, he tries to manage his younger sister's needs while coping with his mother's mood swings and gambling addiction as well as the harsh economic and social circumstances of his surroundings. Amidst the social and economic challenges in his neighborhood, he endeavors to establish himself by engaging in Detroit's music scene. The struggle of Rabbit to find his voice through rap music serves as the film's central theme. It also looks at the gap between the white and black residents in the city and how poverty affects youth culture and music. The film explores issues of urban poverty, black-white tension, youth experiences, and the subculture of rap music. The film raises questions about racial issues in the US utilizing the dichotomy between the white identity of Rabbit and his black surroundings. What seems to be advantegous turns to a menace in his life. Although Rabbit has gone through all the detrimental condition of the neighborhood, he is constantly being discriminated in the black community because of his skin color. This contradiction can be expanded to several more dichotomies such as poverty–wealth, power–weakness and community–alienation. Always in the underpriviledged side, Rabbit struggles to triumph over the community that imposes the cruel reality of the unfair social realm on him.

Although the majority of acclaimed films about rap music originate from the USA, there is an increasing trend in international cinema to incorporate rap music themes. Traces of rap music and hip-hop culture in general can be found extensively in the *banlieue* films of French cinema. The banlieue films are characterized by depicting the lives and hardships of people who live in peripheries that encircle large cities. These movies usually deal with issues like crime, unemployment, racial discrimination, social inequality, and conflict between various cultural groups which are themes also employed by rap music. Films like Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995) portray the harsh realities and socioeconomic struggles faced by the youth and immigrant communities in these marginalized areas. While not explicitly categorized as a film centered on hip-hop culture, *La Haine* (1995) effectively explores themes of resistance through its use of rap music. Likewise, the themes of rap music have flourished in Turkish cinema since the 2010s. Films such as *Çekmeköy Underground* (Türkmen, 2015) and *When I'm Done Dying* (Dağ, 2020) depict young individuals striving to break free from their circumstances and economic as well as social constraints, and fulfill their potential. Building on the themes of resistance and reconciliation present in these films, this study examines *Casablanca Beats*

(Ayouch, 2021) as a significant international example that explores the cultural and social forms of rap music.

Method

This study explores the subcultural practices associated with rap music as portrayed in movies by focusing on a contemporary international example of the genre. The main purpose of the study is to examine the social realities that underpin and define this cultural phenomenon through cinematic representations in the film *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021). The sample film was purposefully chosen upon the observance that it portrays the rap subculture in a social context realistically. Another reason for choosing this example is that the movie was made outside of the established studio system, claiming to be a true representation of reality. This study utilizes the descriptive analysis method, a qualitative research approach, to clarify the aforementioned interaction between rap subcultural practices and their social context as represented in cinema. A descriptive research "*highlights the outstanding characteristics of a sample, or of the population from which the sample was drawn*" (Gray, Williamson, Karp, & Dalphin, 2007, p. 398). In order to conduct a descriptive analysis, the researcher must first present a theory that lays out the general guidelines he/she will adhere to throughout the investigation (Berg, 2001, p. 230). Therefore, a literature review was formed in the context of rap subculture, its social background and its place in cinema. Within this contextual background, Raymond Williams' terms "residual culture", "dominant culture" and "emergent culture" were used as a guideline to describe the main issues in the study. In the second part of the study where the analysis takes place, two subcategories relevant to the literature review were employed. To illustrate the main context, the socio-economics of the space where the narrative takes place was described and then the subcultural representations of rap music were exemplified in Williams' terms. Using this method, the study seeks to offer a thorough grasp of the ways in which the larger social context interacts with the rap subculture and how cinema reproduces this relationship.

Findings

Casablanca Beats (Ayouch, 2021) is a Morroccan drama film which depicts the struggling story of a youth sub-cultural group at an art school located in a ghetto close to Casablanca called Sidi Moumen. The plot starts with the arrival of Anas, a former rap singer, to a community cultural centre in Sidi Moumen. The participants of the school come from the neighborhood and some of them establish a group to practice rap music. As a newcomer Anas tries to assist them to express themselves and find their voices. In time, these youngsters (Ismail, Meryem, Abdou, Amina, Soufiane and others) get the hang of rap music and start using music as a tool to struggle against harsh socio-economic conditions and cultural pressures. The characters try to learn more about rap music and eventually organize a rap-gig that showcases authentic songs and dance moves. As the plot progresses to the event, the characters become increasingly aware of their social circumstances, improve their ability to express themselves, but also grow more weary of the social and economic constraints they face. *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021) tells a powerful story about the experiences of Morocco's young generation and the liberating as well as unifying power of rap subculture. The film delves into the significance of the rap subculture in Morocco and its societal role through the lens of a youth group. It is worth mentioning that *Casablanca Beats* is a film that has strong ties with reality. Ayouch, the director of the movie, also acknowledges the realistic claim of the film by stating that he aimed to depict the outcome of what they go through on a daily basis (Abraham, 2023, p. 383). The storyline is inspired by a hip-hop project in an art centre in Sidi Moumen and non-professional people from the neighborhood are employed as actors. Within the narrative and imagery of the film, viewers observe a comprehensive portrayal of the rap subculture, encompassing elements

such as rap songs, hip-hop dance, graffiti art, and the distinctive hip-hop fashion and explore the resisting nature of hip-hop culture as well as its positive essence.

The Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Slums and their Reflections on the Use of Space

The setting of the film is inspired from a real neighborhood called Sidi Moumen, a slum area close to Casablanca. The film's quest to recreate a world that is closely knit with reality is observed in the use of space. While the plot, the storyline, and the characters are fictional, the film evokes a sense of plausibility, suggesting a potential for reality thanks to the realistic use of space. Hence, providing demographic information regarding the locality of Sidi Moumen would be beneficial. Sidi Moumen is a densely populated area with 452.863 inhabitants. The population predominantly consists of young individuals. 27.95% of the population falls below the age of 15, while 65.10% are aged between 15 and 59, leaving only 6.95% for individuals older than 60 years (Ville de Casablanca, n.d.). As indicated in the demographics, Sidi Moumen is a thriving space with a dominancy of young people in the public sphere. One of the biggest problems in the area is the housing. The housing pattern in the area reflects an unplanned urbanization and uncontrollable expansion since the 1950s when the area attracted a huge number of informal settlers because of the industrialization. As a result, the expansion of tin shacks in Sidi Moumen was closely linked to the region's industrialization and poor economic conditions of the working class. These disadvantegous circumstances detained laborers to dwell in adequate residences (Aoussar, 2018, p. 551).

In the film *Casablanca Beats*, the portrayal of the neighborhood is closely linked with the real circumstances mentioned above. There are quite a lot of images that illustrate the crowded urban space placing significant emphasis on the poor conditions and collective way of living. We may divide the examination of the use of urban space into two subcategories: houses and the streets.

Houses in *Casablanca Beats* are the indicators of the poor economic conditions of the dwellers in the Sidi Moumen slums. In the first scene where Anas drives through the city of Casablanca to arrive in Sidi Moumen, the change in the general look of the cityscape and the economic indicators can clearly be observed. As he approaches the slums, the overall appearance of the landscape transitions abruptly from that of a well-maintained city to that of an informal settlement with irregular structures and inadequate environmental upkeep. While the city center is home to a clean environment, fairly-maintained apartment buildings and adequate roads and highways, the slums are dominated by large piles of garbage scattered along the roads, single-storey makeshift houses and bumpy and improperly constructed roads. Closely interconnected, the houses form a tightly woven pattern. They are positioned in such proximity that their roofs are intertwined. The fact that the houses look entangled reveals the population density of the area and the inadequacy of the houses. In addition to their dense and irregular arrangement, the exterior design of the houses also effectively conveys the financial difficulties that the occupants are facing. The slums are characterized by rusty awning roofs and bare, unpainted walls, which dominate the overall visual landscape. This complex settlement and unplanned urbanization give the impression that the area was built outside the control of the governmental authority. Lack of control and planning is reflected in people's lives, making it difficult to deliver services to them. This notion can be observed in the testimonial lyrics of the rap songs which are written by the students in the art school. An example can be seen in the lyrics of Ismail's song, where he expresses the stark reality that financial resources are required not just for education but also for healthcare. Therefore, it can be claimed that the socio-economic conditions in the setting of the film are not adequate for the characters.
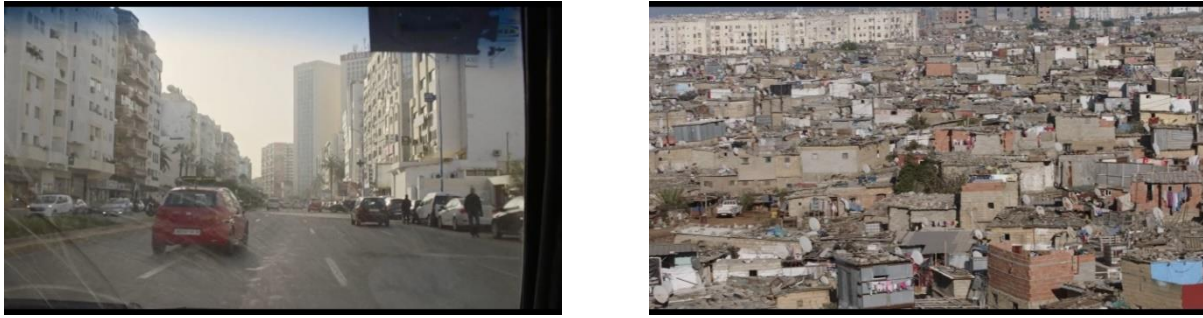
Figure 1: The difference between the appearances of the cityscape and the ghetto

The interiors of the homes give the same impression conveyed by their exteriors. The houses consist of small, sparsely furnished rooms, which are shared by multiple occupants. The children, parents and grandparents collectively use the spaces of the houses leaving no privacy for any of the family members. The young characters have a hard time practicing rap music at home because of the lack of private space and family pressure. The older members of the families think that young people should do what the society imposes on them. However, the young characters seem to contradict these social norms and this contradiction is conveyed through the use of the home settings in the film. For instance, upon returning home from school, Ismail heads straight to the kitchen where he playfully interacts with his mother and sister. This behavior; however, displeases his father, who believes that the kitchen is a space reserved for women. He perceives Ismail's actions as a deviation from traditional gender roles. In addition, young characters are seen listening to rap music with their headphones and singing in a whisper at home. The subcultural practice always continues to exist even if it is silent. In Raymond Williams' terms, this coexistence of people correspond to the existence of residual, dominant and emergent cultures simultaneously. While the dominant culture tailors a normative field for the young characters to embrace, the emergent culture always circulates in the space. The emergent culture shows itself in the contrasting behaviors of the old and young people and the sound design. The young characters create a joyful energy at their homes dancing and singing whereas the old characters are mostly portrayed without movement and emotion. These contrasting images show that there is a clash between the dominant and emergent cultures.

The images of the streets convey similar meanings as the houses do. As a public space, streets accomodate numerous social actors and their daily activities. The characters practice subcultural agency, interact with people and at the same time they are ostracized through these random encounters in the streets. There are three specific scenes portraying these interactions, generating visual representations of the clash between dominant and emergent cultures. In the first scene, the girl members of the subcultural group dance while they are walking in the street. They encounter an old woman while dancing and the old woman looks at them intimidated by their activity. The activity of dancing to rap music is seen as a kind of deviance from the cultural norms of the society. Another scene shows Ismail experiencing a creative and self-expressive moment in the streets. Late at night, he wakes his sister up and asks her to come with him. They start running in the narrow streets of the slums and then he starts singing "*I'm gonna make it, gonna dig you out of the dirt we were born in. Though life for us is locked*". There is a strong correlation with the lyrics of this song and the streets because the narrowness of the streets seem like a spatial barrier before them to overcome. In addition, Ismail's timing is important in that scene because he chooses the midnight when there is nobody around for this liberating act. This preference shows that there is a pressure on youngsters to hide their subcultural agency. In the last scene, the students are trying to sell tickets in the crowded spaces of the city for their upcoming concert. Most of the people walking by refuse to buy tickets, and some of them admonish the young people for not working and being idle, pointing out that things like listening to rap music are futile. These scenes that reveal a dichotomy of the dominant culture of the

society and the emergent culture of the young people can be regarded as a new social formation that is interwoven with different points of view. It manifests that the cultural sphere is in a process of transformation. Therefore, spatial connotations of the subcultural practice envolving rap music can be regarded as a reconciliation with the dominant culture more than it is a form of resistance. Furthermore, the liberating actions of young rappers can be viewed as an outgrowth of an emerging culture. They endeavor to express themselves and gain visibility in the public sphere, aligning with the aspiration that their current struggles may one day go hand in hand with the dominant culture. It seems like the emergent culture lingers in the public field as a ghost that the dominant culture refuses to see. The physical actions of the young people can be viewed as the practices of the emergent culture trying to be a part of the social realm.

The use of space in *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021) reflects the socio-economic conditions of the slums in Morroco and it also embodies significant meanings regarding the rap subculture embraced by the characters. The everyday lives of the residents and the way they communicate their existence with the outside world are effected significantly by the circumstances of the place they live in. As mentioned before, rap music is closely associated with streets and underpriviledged communities. Therefore, the use of space in the sample film gives a realistic portrayal of the rap subculture and its link with the neighborhood.

Emerging Subcultural Agency in a Dominant Cultural Sphere

As mentioned before, *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021) portrays two opposing aspects of the Moroccan society that are often at odds with one another. One of these aspects is the youth culture in an emerging process and the other aspect is the dominant culture which is resistant to change. The young characters are representatives of a newly rising worldview which embraces freedom, prosperity and tolerance. However, the dominant culture is highly conservative of its long-established values. The clash between these two beings form an intersection point which embodies a field of struggle. This struggle can be characterized as a form of resistance aimed at challenging both the interpretation of religion by the society and gender-related disparities within the societal framework.

One of the biggest concerns of the film is the interpretation of religion and the way it is articulated in the society. This issue is highly problematized by rap music because it is a substantial barrier that makes it difficult for the young characters to be truely a part of the society. There is a consensus within the society that protest arts like rap music cannot go with religion. Therefore, the way the religion is perceived and uttered in the social sphere stands as a hindrance to the self-expression of the young people. Ayouch (2021, p. 385) also acknowledges this assertion by stating that youth is forced to choose either religion or art. However, the film shows that there are ways to combine both. In fact, the positive consolidation of religion through rap music is not something uncommon. Rappers try to strike a balance between their religious beliefs and their pursuits within the hip-hop subculture by incorporating other aspects of the subculture, such as dance, graffiti, and clothes (Price-Styles, 2015, p. 53). However, the general view of religion seems to prevent this positive correlation to expand to the social field.

Casablanca Beats (Ayouch, 2021) presents some stark indicators suggesting that there is a growing tendency in youth to blend their own voice with religion. For example, the characters Meryem and Amina raps with their veils on and they employ this unity in their lyrics. In a relevant scene, Amina goes on to stage to sing, but she is interrupted by the sound of the call to prayer coming from the mosque. Out of respect, she waits for the prayer to finish. Then, she speaks words about being religious and rapping: "*they curse me coz I sing with my veil. Do I need to undress to tell my tale?*". These words may appear to be a rejection against the religious norms, but it is actually a reconciliation with it. It shows that religion can be a part of

everyday life and so can rap music. In the subsequent parts of the film, Amina is forced to leave the art center by her mother. Her presence and activities in the subcultural group is seen as a deviant behavior against religious and social norms. However, she secretly comes back to school and keeps on practicing rap music. Another scene that explores the complex and ambivalent relationship between religion and rap subculture is expressed through a male character, Abdou. Abdou is a young man who has lived his whole life according to religious norms and with the introduction of rap music he starts questioning the way the society perceives and reflects upon religion. After a heated debate on what women should wear to exist in the society and what kind of clothes would be appropriate for religious views, he meets a few of the male members of his extended family and gets preached about the incompatibility of rap music and religion. One of them subjectively states that "*some musical instruments are permitted, others forbidden*" and one another says that "*dance means intermixing. In our religion, men and women don't mix*". At some point of the conversation, the cinematic aesthetics non-diegetically changes and Abdou starts day-dreaming about a hip-hop dance group confronting a religious group in a dance contest on the street.

Figure 2. Two contrasting groups of young people encountering in a dance contest

The location of this confrontation holds significance, as rap music is intricately linked with urban streets, thereby shifting the context to the realm of the subcultural space. This scene compresses the two contradicting social fields in one cinematic image and melts them in a pot. This co-existence should not be regarded as a total peace between the two realms; however, it is an indicator that dominant cultures cannot impose an absolute power on the emergent cultures. They all exist together, interact on some levels and create new meanings in the social sphere. Later in the scene, Abdou starts singing with the lyrics "*…in this clash of civilizations and religions, I can't tell what is allowed or forbidden. Where is the line between fate and deviance?... Some sully our religion with their allusions*". Through these lines, he declares that he is in search of truth and advocates his subjective way of expressing an emerging approach to belief systems.

Another issue that is problematized in the narrative is the dominant gender roles circulating in the social sphere and prevailing over youth agency. Gender roles are determinative on the lives of both male and female members of the group. Male members are supposed to act within the patriarchal system. They have to work and provide for the family which means that there is no time for the subcultural endeavors. On the other hand, female members are supposed to remain at home and engage in household chores. What's more, they have to yield to the social norms and lead a conservative life under the patriarchal pressure. Meryem is a good example to the juxtaposition of gender roles and feminine agency through rap subculture. In a particular scene, Meryem takes off from the art center and she sees her brother waiting to escort her on the way back home. Meryem is clearly upset because she feels that it is a violation of freedom. On the way, she utters a spoken poetry with the lyrics "*For you, women are slaves and it makes me sick. For you, being a man means dominating us…I want us to be equal, man and woman. Same rights and freedom. Being my brother gives you no*

rights over me". In these lines, it is observed that Meryem defies the patriarchal social system and how it is shaped in favor of male members of the society. Though singing about patriarchy with self-expressive words is a resistance, Meryem doesn't entirely reject the male members of the society and seek solitude. Instead, she tries to compromise with men in equal terms. Moreover, Meryem adds that she feels obligated to hide her identity, but the rap subculture opens a third space for her in which she can express her identity. She says "*I can only be me on stage where I am free, where color and appearance make no difference…I am myself when I rap*". Although the dominant culture seem like it doesn't leave any space for the minor voices, they never seize to exist. In this way, it is highlighted in Meryem's discourse that the dominant culture and the emergent culture are parts of an everchanging entity and they are in a process of transformation.

The conclusion of the film delivers a clear message about the clash between the dominant and emerging cultures. The rappers from the Positive School stage a performance that sparks significant social backlash, temporarily halting their rap activities and prompting Anas to contemplate leaving his job. However, in the final scene, the young characters appear on the school rooftop, defiantly singing and making their voices heard. While it appears to be a conclusion, this scene actually symbolizes an ongoing resistance and reconciliation. This is a resistance against social norms because they express themselves even though the society wants to silence them, and it is a reconciliation because they raise their voices in a public space where everybody can hear them. This scene is important to show that emergent cultures cannot be terminated and that they are a part of the social sphere.

Conclusion

Cinema has the potential to reproduce and portray reality in such a powerful way that it turns to a platform of interaction between artistic expression and social agents. It possesses the capacity to make something seen which otherwise may miss to be noticed in real life experiences. To put it differently, cinema reveals the hidden aspects of the real world. One of these realities is the subcultural communities that try to find their voices, react against the dominant social structures and cultures and simply sustaining their lives within a determinative social realm. This struggle is sometimes regarded as a form of resistance and sometimes as a reconciliation with the dominant cultures. Cinema is an important medium that portrays this struggle realistically and that carries it to a larger audience.

Rap music, as a striking example, is a part of a vibrant subculture that uses lyrics, music, and performance arts to interact with the society on a deep level. Rap, which is mostly popular among youth, uses lyrics that highlight social injustice, economic disparity, political criticism, and personal experiences to address social issues. Through music and art, this subculture contributes significantly to young people's process of developing their identities. Additionally, by giving subordinate groups a voice and a platform for expression, rap music and the subculture surrounding it support social change. In this situation, the rap subculture manages to carve out a distinct space for itself in society by means of both resistance and reconciliation.

This study focuses on the portrayal of rap subculture in cinema. For this main purpose, the film *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021) was purposely chosen because it is observed that it constitutes a realistic example to depict the issue in a social context. As a result of the descriptive analysis conducted on the sample film, it is observed that the contextual framework on the rap subculture is illustrated in a realistic way. To be more precise, the film takes place in a slum that is home to a large number of economically deprived and socially marginalized people. Deeply ingrained traditional values have a big impact on this society, which makes it a pervasive place where young people who want to live different lives have to deal with a lot of social pressure. These demands are a result of a cultural conservatism that values following the

status quo, which presents difficulties for the younger generation that chooses different routes. Youth's freedom of choice and expression is frequently restricted by the society's expectations of them to be in line with the dominant social meanings. Within this dichotomy established between the dominant culture of the society and the emergent culture of the subcultural communities, rap music steps in as an escape route that functions as a third space. In this third space, young people can express their thoughts, emotions, hopes and criticisms. Moreover, they can interact with the dominant culture and work on changing it.

The film vividly portrays the fraught relationship between young people and social authority, centering its themes around the notion of rap music. It highlights key aspects of rap through the use of space and the exploration of gender issues and religion, which are central to the narrative. By employing these elements, the film creates a multitude of images that realistically depict young rappers navigating the social realm, sometimes through resistance and sometimes through reconciliation. Therefore, it might be asserted that *Casablanca Beats* (Ayouch, 2021) represents the rap subcultural practice as both a resistance and a reconciliation with the dominant culture in a way that doesn't compromise on the practitioners' personal rights and authentic voice.

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