

**FEMALE RAP IN ARAB COUNTRIES. THE CASE OF
MAYAM MAHMOUD**
Rap femenino en países árabes. El caso de Mayam Mahmoud

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Abstract: Female rappers in the Arab world have increased in both number and prominence in recent years. Yet, while there is extensive bibliography on female rap in the Western world, few studies have examined female rap in the Arab world. This paper represents a preliminary approach to this phenomenon, offering a general overview of the female rappers in various Arab countries and the different issues they address. The paper then goes on to analyze a corpus consisting of the texts of the young Egyptian rapper Mayam Mahmoud, who has become internationally famous, highlighting linguistic aspects as well as the themes. The topics preferred by female Arab rappers include political problems in their country and social themes such as the situation of women, their day-to-day reality, the struggle against sexism and solidarity among women. The language used is direct, straightforward and free of social conventions. These aspects are in line with “conscious” rap created by women around the world. Rap music has become a vehicle through which women seek to secure a share of the power, affirm their choices and build alternative visions of their identity.

Resumen: Las raperas en el mundo árabe han ido aumentando y ganando notoriedad en los últimos años. Si bien encontramos una extensa bibliografía sobre el rap femenino en el mundo occidental, existen pocos estudios sobre el rap femenino en el mundo árabe. Esta investigación constituye un acercamiento preliminar a este fenómeno, ofreciendo un panorama general de los nombres de las raperas en los distintos países árabes y los temas abordados. A continuación, el trabajo se centra en el análisis de un corpus formado por los textos de la joven rapera egipcia Mayam Mahmoud, que se ha hecho famosa internacionalmente, y destaca tanto los aspectos lingüísticos como los temáticos. Los temas de las raperas árabes consisten en problemas políticos vinculados a su país y cuestiones sociales como la condición de la mujer, la denuncia del sexismo, la realidad vivida a diario, la solidaridad femenina. El lenguaje utilizado es directo, desafilado y libre de convenciones sociales. Estos aspectos están en consonancia con el rap “consciente” femenino en el mundo. La música rap se convierte en un vehículo a través del cual las mujeres buscan asegurarse una parte del poder, afirmar sus elecciones y reconstruir visiones alternativas de su identidad.

Key words: Female Arab rap. Mayam Mahmoud. Sociolinguistics. Egyptian Arabic. Arabic language.

Palabras clave: Rap árabe femenino. Mayam Mahmoud. Sociolingüística. Árabe egipcio. Idioma árabe.

INTRODUCTION

In the Arab world the rap scene, although dominated by men, is not completely hostile to the idea of the possibility of a female presence within the genre.

Famous singers or rap groups such as DAM, Y Crew, Arabian Knightz or El Général do not contemplate misogynist or macho ideas in their music; on the contrary, mixed collaborations are frequent, such as the one between Arabian Knightz and Shadia Mansour in the realization of the famous song *il-Sigīm* “The prisoner”. We find attitudes of solidarity on the part of some male artists as in the lyric *il-Ḥurriyye unta* “Freedom is female” by DAM, in which the contribution of women in the Egyptian revolution is celebrated. Noteworthy is the case of the famous Moroccan rapper Muslim who was the first to make a song about the violence suffered by women in Morocco: his text *La la* “No, no” (2019) caused a sensation among the public.

In recent years, therefore, women have been making their way into the Arab music scene of hip hop, with all the difficulties due both to rap itself considered as an import and “rebellious” genre and to the difficulty of seeing this genre suitable for a woman.

Female artists use their performances as a platform to reject, destroy or reconstruct alternative views of their identity. So rap music becomes a vehicle through which women seek to secure a share of power, affirm their choices and create spaces for themselves and other women.

The panorama is quite varied, but most of the female artists make a socially and politically committed rap, addressing in their songs themes considered taboo or in any case linked to the condition of women.

Studies on music and gender on western female rap are numerous, but research on female rap in the Arab world is scant if not non-existent.

This work aims to make a contribution in this area, through an overview of the state of female rap in the Arab world and then through the examination of a specific singer, the young Egyptian Mayam Mahmoud, a very interesting case for the issues addressed and for being one of the few artists to become internationally known, thanks to the Arabs Got Talent program. The singer's production is still small; in this work three songs, chosen for the relevance of their issues, have been analyzed. A content and linguistic analysis was carried out on these three texts.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON FEMALE RAP

Gender studies in ethnomusicology emerged as academic research in the early 1980s¹.

About the rap genre it is often channeled into gender studies². Critics and academics have often associated rap music with urban male culture. Although rap has often been presented as a male-dominated art form, women have been part of the scene since the years of commercial rap.

The spread of a successful female rap has taken place starting from the 1990s.

Specific studies on women and rap, have identified four categories of female rappers: “Queen Mother”, “Fly Girl”, “Sista with Attitude” and “Lesbian”³. The first category includes female rappers who present themselves as African-American icons, an image often suggested by their clothes and reflect the African cultural tradition. These include singers such as Queen Kenya⁴, Queen Latifah, Sister Souljah.

“Fly Girl” describes the kind of woman rapper who dresses fashionably, sometimes provocatively, who wears jewels and flashy makeup, a style that spread in the wake of the Blaxploitation films⁵ in the late 1960s and mid-1970s. From the mid-1980s, many female MCs began to contest the image of the “fly girl”, aiming for an audience that would focus more on their rapping skills, rather than their looks. The third category “Sista with Attitude” includes those MC women who consider the attitude to aggression, arrogance, rebellion as a manifestation of power and present themselves in such attitudes. The last type of female rapper is the “Lesbian” who emerged later than the others and precisely towards the end of the Nineties⁶.

Some research on hip hop has focused attention on language and genre in rap music, but it still need to be expanded and deepened. These studies are based on the emotional models present in rap and illustrate how the dominant emotional sphere in the songs of male rappers is linked to strength and skills⁷. Studies of rap songs in the United States highlight how the lyrics of male singers support patriarchal superiority with sexist terms. Regarding terms used by male rappers and

1. The bibliography is very extensive. Among the many studies we mention: Gaunt. “Translating double-dutch”; Koskoff. “An introduction to women, music, and culture”.

2. El-Tayeb. *European others*; Hill Collins. *From Black power to hip hop*.

3. For further information: Keyes. “Empowering self”.

4. Queen Kenya, a member of the Zulu Nation, was the first female MC to use the title “Queen”.

5. Term born from the fusion of the two English words black and exploitation: it was a genre of film that was born in the United States, in the early seventies, when many films were made at low cost having African Americans as their target audience.

6. Regarding studies about black lesbian identity and culture: Walker. *In search of our mothers' gardens*; Omosupe. “Black/lesbian/bulldagger”.

7. Ryan & Calhoun. “Gender or genre?”, p. 144.

female rappers, linguistic differences are identified: in men's texts, women are often referred to with unflattering nouns such as "bitch", "slut", "whore" and are considered as sexual objects⁸. The female singers, on the other hand, through a feminist language, try to transform the image of the black woman, sometimes however, through a contradictory message deriving from the exposure of their bodies and their own sexuality⁹.

In the language of female rappers of the "gangsta" genre¹⁰, the derogatory terms used by men, such as "bitch" and "ho" (from "whore") to refer to women, are also used but in a different way: women rappers can use these terms with negative meanings, but also with positive connotations, as an affirmation of solidarity, in the same way that male rappers use the terms "nigga" or "nigger"¹¹.

The gender influences communication, choice of topics, way of interaction and vocabulary. Some studies¹² researched the language of adolescents and found that girls use language to entertain relationships and create feelings of closeness and equality, while boys use language to establish and maintain their positions and supremacy. The speeches of the girls appear to have neither hierarchical nor competitive traits, but reflect cooperation, intimacy, loyalty and dedication, while the masculine speeches are characterized by hierarchical and strength structures, by elements that express competition and lack of cooperation.

These characteristics are also found in the language and themes of rap lyrics: men's songs tend to be more self-celebrating and individualistic, while women's songs focus more on relationality even between men and women and on the condition of women in society. Female rappers, albeit sometimes using a very aggressive language, never reach the threatening and violent tones of male rappers. Women also tend to a genre of rap more linked to the social and political dimension, touching, from time to time, personal issues; men, in many cases, even when they face social issues often express themselves with violent images.

Although women rappers constitute a strong presence in the hip hop scene, they remain fewer than male artists: this imbalance is both cause and effect of the marked misogyny in rap. Misogynistic hip hop shows a conception of woman as an object that man can dispose of, use, abuse¹³.

8. Motschenbacher. *Language gender*, pp. 51-52.

9. Rose. *Black noise*, pp. 32-33.

10. Historically "gangsta rap" describes the life of the ghetto from the point of view of a criminal figure.

11. For further information: Haugen. "Unladylike divas".

12. Stenström. "It's not that I really care", pp. 115-116.

13. Adams & Fuller. "The words have changed", p. 950.

Rap music and hip hop culture in American society are often associated with forms of transmission and reproduction of sexism and misogyny. The male-dominated attitude on the part of some rappers explains the marginalization of women within the rap music scene, particularly when the latter do not conform to the normative roles assigned to them within hip hop¹⁴.

Rapper Roxanne Shante became the symbol of feminist hip hop when she released the song “Roxanne’s Revenge” in 1984, in response to a UTFO song in which she was referred to with offensive nicknames as “bitch”.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, female rappers such as Queen Latifah, Monie Love, MC Lyte emerged and were considered the feminist pioneers of hip hop. Latifah promoted women’s rights in the song “Ladies First” on the album “All Hail the Queen” (1989). MC Lyte, who debuted with the album “Lyte as a Rock”, included the adapted song “I’m woman” by Helen Reddy from 1972, a text considered one of the anthems of female emancipation.

Although references to misogyny in the hip hop world are fundamental for an in-depth analysis on gender and language issues, it should be emphasized that only a part of rap possesses these discriminatory characteristics towards women; in fact some groups that carry out a politically committed type of hip hop include women¹⁵.

Also in the Arab world there are musical collaborations between the two sexes, such as the one between the Arabian Knightz and Shadia Mansour in the realization of the famous song *il-Sigīn* “The prisoner” (2011). A novelty in the Arab rap scene is the introduction in the historic and famous DAM group of a young Palestinian female rapper, Maysa Daw: a rare case of a mixed group in the world of hip hop. In one of the last songs, *Mīn inta?* “Who are you?” (2015) together with the new female member of the group, the DAM take sides against all kinds of misogyny in society. This concept is expressed, not only in this one, but also in other previous songs such as *Law irža’ bə-l-zamān* (“If I went back in time”) (2012) in which the group declares itself against the crime of honor.

Despite these cases, misogynist rappers are also present in the Arab world; about the language used in their texts, the tones are moderate compared to the language used in many American songs. In the Moroccan reality, the rapper Yasmine, in his song entitled “I’ll freak you like that”¹⁶, refers to women in an inele-

14. There is a significant amount of feminist research on hip hop in the United States: Durham. “The stage hip-hop feminism built”; Pough. *Home girls make some noise*; Rose. *Black noise*.

15. To name one example, rapper Lin Que, known as Isis, was a prominent member of the rap group Blackwatch, known for her Afrocentrism and militant activism.

16. Some verses are reported below: *Tell me what’s on your mind I’ll freak you like that / Lemme know what’s on your mind I’ll freak you like that / You’re going to like that I’m hot like that*.

gant way, but it is interesting that these kind of texts are produced in French or English.

A LOOK AT FEMALE RAP IN THE ARAB WORLD

While rap studies in the Arab world¹⁷ are on the rise, specific research on female Arab rap is scarce.

The development of hip hop in the Middle East and North Africa has also favored female voices: in the Arab world, in recent years, we are witnessing the success of several female rappers. Taking into consideration what the web offers us, an overview of the female rap scene in the Arab world will be presented below¹⁸, but there is also an underground reality known only locally.

From the data provided by the web, the phenomenon of female rap in Arab countries dates back to just over ten years ago with diffusion and developments that differ from country to country¹⁹.

The countries showing a more active scene are Morocco and Tunisia in the Maghreb and Egypt and the Palestinian territories in the Mashreq. One of the difficulties in analyzing the songs of the artists is that often the videos are removed in a short time, presumably for censorship or for reasons still unknown.

The artists are generally released from the record companies, so the songs are traceable only online and are not distributed on CD: this also as a result of ideological choices of the authors themselves, in order to have autonomy and freedom, not negotiable for commercial purposes in their own artistic production. In addition to individual ideological choices, it is also important to underline that hip hop in general is affected by the controversial relationship between protest music and the Arab music industry. One of the problems for artists is to access

17. Literature offers many studies about Maghrebi rap: Guerrero. "Zanka Flow"; Meouak y Aguadé. "La Rhorhomanie et les beurs"; Caubet. "Génération darija!"; Langone. "Facteur D (Darija) et nouvelle génération marocaine". Many authors have turned their attention to rap in Palestine: McDonald. *My voice is my weapon*; Lovatt. *Palestinian hip hop culture*; Maira & Magid. *Hip hop from '48 Palestine*; Massad. *Liberating songs*; Orr. *Legitimizing narratives in rhyme*. For further information on Lebanese rap: Fischione. "A critique of religious sectarianism through satire". The following studies are some researches emerged in recent years on hip hop during the Arab revolutions: Filii. *La révolution arabe*; Guerrero. "Rap y revolución en el mundo árabe"; Procházka. "The voice of freedom". For more information on rap in the Arab world and some hints on female rap: De Blasio. *Il rap nel mondo arabo*.

18. The reference sites are: www.revolutionaryarabrap.blogspot.com; www.reverbanation.com; www.genius.com and the YouTube channel for videos.

19. Besides the female rappers that I quote in this paragraph we find on the web: Medusa TN (Tunisia), Selma Rosa (Algeria/France), MC Meera (Jordan), Raja Meziane (Algeria/Czechia), Krtas Nssa (Morocco), Ily (Morocco), N1yah (United Arab Emirates), Dania DN Closer (Syria), Leesa A (Saudi Arabia), Queen Nesrin (Tunisia), Miss Moone (Bahrain), Whezzy (Libya), Ettijah (Palestine), Haifa

recording studios and find record labels willing to sponsor them. Furthermore, despite the popularity of some channels dedicated to Arabic music, it is not easy for rap to conquer a space on radio or television.

Starting from the Maghreb, in Morocco one of the most successful rappers is surely Soultana; this Moroccan artist is not only the first female rapper in Morocco, she is also a staunch supporter for women's rights and an activist that uses her lyrical prowess to tackle social issues in home country. Her international hit, *Ṣawt nsa* "The Voice of Women" (2011) is an effort to combat sexual harassment in Morocco; in this lyric the artist represents the life conditions of some Moroccan women, through a very frank and direct language.

In recent years in Morocco Manal Benchlikha became very famous for her texts that highlight the Moroccan man's vision of women. One of her most popular songs is *Tāž* "Crown" (2018) in which she denounces the male-dominated and arrogant attitude of her peers and responds to such behaviors with aggression: in the video the artist holds guns and sticks and uses vulgar gestures, apparently reflecting the typology of the rapper "Sista with Attitude" who considers the attitude to violence as a manifestation of power; only at the end of the video we discover that the guns are not real and that the singer has made fun of her molesters, getting her revenge.

Another Moroccan rapper is known under the pseudonym of Rikamora and she is author of *Ma-ši ana* "Not me" (2018), and *Ġī lli bgāw* "Just what they want" (2018), texts that mainly deal with the condition of young people in Moroccan society.

On the web we can also come across the Tigresse Flow group made up of four girls from Casablanca; among the best known lyrics we mention *Kifāš?* "How?" (2010) whose text denounces corruption in Morocco and *Mağribiyya* "Moroccan" (2008) song that expresses the strength of the Moroccan woman and the pride for her country.

Tania Chanel is a Spanish-Moroccan trap rapper. The texts of the young singer, who broke into the traditionally male dominated rap scene in Spain, reflects her everyday experiences.

Among the Tunisian rappers we mention Ruka with the song *Fawḍā* "Chaos" (2017), F.B. K with the lyric *Ka'āb-i* "My heels" (2020) and Tuny Girl who has produced several singles but has made herself known above all through her song *'Aksa* "Bad luck"²⁰ (2014). Boutheina El Alouadi is one of the few professional

Beseisso (Palestine), Popytirz (Tunisia), Khtek (Morocco). For further information: <https://madamerap.com/>.

20. <https://www.kulturevulturez.com/top-tunisian-rappers/>.

and politically courageous female rappers in Tunisia: in her songs she denounces sexism and criticizes Salafism²¹.

Meryem Saci is a Montreal-based songwriter and hip-hop artist who escaped Algeria to Montreal during the civil war. Her music ranges in different genres: soul, R&B, jazz, reggae and hip-hop and her newest track, “*On My Way*” (2017), is a perfect example of her eclectic sound. The music of Meryem Saci was used on the Netflix series “*Iron Fist*”.

In Saudi Arabia Asayel Slay became famous with her debut song, *Bint Makka* “Mecca Girl” (2020) in which she celebrates the Meccan women. The song drew criticism from conservatives, who accused the rapper of undermining the customs and traditions of Mecca. The contents of the text led to the singer’s arrest, but she was released shortly after.

A famous artist of Palestinian origin is Shadia Mansour know as “the first lady of Arabic hip hop” who started composing rap music in 2003 and has gained recognition in the Middle East, Europe and the United States for her songs and for the various collaborations with other artists.

Although she was born and raised in England, she sings in Arabic, since this language brings her closer to her roots and represents a tool through which to represent in a more incisive way the issues dear to her such as that of the Palestinian cause. The lyrics of Shadia fall into the genre of political, non-commercial rap, which is why the singer is not linked to any record company. Her first single is *il-Kūfiyyi ‘arabiyyi* “The keffiyeh is Arab” (2011), a song performed together with the rapper M-1 of Dead Prez, in which the singer emphasizes the role of the keffiyeh, symbol of Arab nationalism.

As previously mentioned Shadia collaborated with the Egyptian group of Arabian Knightz on the song *il-Sigīn* “The prisoner” that has become internationally famous; the words of the refrain express the denunciation of contingent reality and the desire for a better future: *ana ‘āyiz balad ḥurra min il-zulm, ‘āyiz balad ḥurra min il-ahr, ‘āyiz balad ḥurra min il-šarr* “I want a country free from injustice, I want a country free from oppression, I want a country free from evil”.

In the Palestinian territories other women have had a significant role in the underground scene: Sabreena Da Witch who also wrote a song to all those who lost their lives before their time and the Arapyat (*‘Arabiyyāt*) formed by the duo Nahawa Abed Alaal and Safaah Hathot of Acre.

In Lebanon, Lynn Fattouh famous as Malikah (from the Arabic *malika* “queen”) has increasingly established herself; she was born in France and precise-

21 <https://en.qantara.de/content/tunisian-rapper-boutheina-el-alouadi-rapping-against-sexism-and-salafists>

ly in Marseille in 1986, but raised in Beirut under the shadow of civil war. Malikah made her musical debut in the Lebanese hip hop scene at the age of sixteen. She worked with EMI Arabia in 2003, after winning a hip-hop contest. Since then, Malikah has been known as the “Arab queen of hip-hop”, attracting fans throughout the Arab world but also in Europe. Many texts of this singer have as topics events and situations inherent to her country, therefore, her rap is part of the “conscious rap”²² trend. The choice of the nickname Malikah follows the style of the American rappers (“Queen Mothers”) who have distinguished themselves for their political rap. Furthermore, female rappers often appeal to each other “queens”, as a sign of solidarity, in fact they associate an idea of power and respect to this term.

In Malikah’s lyrics, in addition to political issues, there is a particular interest in questions concerning women: in *Ya imra’a* “Oh woman” (2008) the singer becomes the spokesperson for the topic of emancipation of women in Lebanon. Among other lyrics we also mention: *Heyk šāyra blēd-na* “So is our country”, *Ya Lābnān* “Lebanon!”, *Šū ‘am-biṣīr* “What is happening?”, *‘Am-ḥāreb* “I am fighting”, *Samm bā-l-damm* “Poison in the blood” (all written between 2007 and 2008).

The American-Syrian rapper Mona Haydar is known for her protest music, and is powerfully challenging misconceptions about veiled women around the world. Since 2017 the singer has become an outspoken role model for young Muslim women. With her protest anthem, “*Wrap my Hijab*” (2017), sung in English, the artist has become famous as not only a talented female rapper, but one who isn’t afraid to unapologetically stand up for what she believes in. Haydar uses her platform to promote equality and cultural awareness through rap, discussing everything from religion to gender to sexuality.

A particular case is represented by Nayomi’s multilingualism: the Iraqi-Syrian artist, who resides in Sweden, raps in Swedish, English and Arabic.

The female rap scene in Egypt is quite prolific. In Egypt the first female rapper was the Anglo-Egyptian Princess Emmanuelle, who sings mostly in English.

Among the most recent rap singers in Egypt we find: the cairote Sawsan Adel known as “Soska Girl” who has composed countless lyrics including *‘Āfārīt* “Brats” (2018), *Hugūm ‘a-l-sawra* “Attack on the revolution” (2017), *Bint maṣriyya* “Egyptian girl” (2011), Alya Alee author of *‘Asfa*, “I’m sorry” (2013), *Ana mīn* “Who I am?” (2014) and Yukka Shahin originally from Alexandria and currently a law student in Copenhagen, who has composed texts such as *Risāla*

²² The “conscious rap” focuses on social issues. *The Messag* di Grandmaster Flash (1982) was the first “conscious” song; the themes of the text are poverty, violence and the problems of black youth.

“Letter” (2018), *Ma-ft-š fayda* “There is no hope” (2011), *Il-Sabab* “The reason” (2017).

The Egyptian rapper Felukah is one of the most up-and-coming artists on the scene today, she is a prolific performer who draws a great deal of inspiration from her cultural heritage; her lyrics deal with various issues, ranging from the Arab Spring, all the way to gender roles in Egyptian society. The texts of Egyptian artist known as Taffy are about her daily life and experience; her rhymes and lyrics address the issues of modern love and contemporary materialism, accompanied by fresh sounds and catchy tunes.

Sometimes these artists have even managed to reach great audience, as in the case of the young Egyptian rapper Mayam Mahmoud who deals in her texts with the thorny issue of sexual harassment of women in Egypt and who arrived at the semifinals of the Arabs Got Talent television program (2013) with the lyric *Ana miš sigāra* “I am not a cigarette”.

In the hip hop scenario, female rappers tend to follow a male jargon and style, characterized by direct language and strong expressions, traits however inherent to this musical genre. Generally the language, expressed in their songs, is more aggressive than that used by girls within society and in everyday life, in contrast to the general stereotype of what is expected of a female language. Presumably this could be the result of male dominance in the rap scene in which the female artists work, but also a consequence of the possibilities and freedom offered by rap in terms of communication, providing women with a public space in which to express themselves to assert their identity and their own thought.

As with global hip hop, we can observe that female artists of Arab origin use terms referring to concepts of solidarity and positivity in general as the topics of their lyrics show. The themes of their texts focus on social issues linked above all to the question of women, for example Malikah in her song *Ya imra'a* (“Woman”) addresses the issue of women’s emancipation in Lebanon, Shadia Mansour in *Rūḥa bala riž'a* (“One way only”) deals with a sensitive issue, namely that of women in prison and Soultana in *Ṣawt nsa* “The Voice of Women” draws attention to issues related to women. A recurring theme is the condition of women in the various realities and local contexts in which each singer finds herself, such as for example in *Mağribiyya* of Tigresse Flow, *Bint Makka* of Asayel Slay and *Bint maṣriyya* of Sawsan Adel.

The rap produced by the women artists can be defined “conscious rap” for the issues addressed, for the interest related to current issues of local contemporary society, for the deep knowledge of contingent political dynamics. A difference to be noted for what concerns the themes, compared to the Arab male rapper world,

is that the lyrics of the female singers rarely contemplate the theme of love, a topic instead treated more often by male rappers.

MAYAM MAHMOUD AND HER TEXTS

About the life of Mayam Mahmoud there is not much news from the web; she was born in Giza (a city twenty kilometers from Cairo) in 1995.

The artist graduated with a degree in Economics from Cairo. Her mother played an important role in Mayam's path to rap, in fact she introduced her to poetry at the age of twelve and encouraged her to write lyrics. When the poetry of Mayam turned into rap, her parents were initially skeptical but gradually supported and allowed her to record the first track in Alexandria²³.

At just eighteen through her participation on Arabs Got Talent, the variety show that became a prime-time hit across the Middle East, Mayam is been one of the few female rappers to attract mainstream attention. In fact, she reached the semifinals of the program with the song *Ana miš sigāra* "I am not a cigarette" (2013). Her appearances on television were her first public performances. The fact that Mayam wears the *hiġāb* in her performances has aroused various reactions in the audience, challenging the expectations of some Egyptians.

The interest in her music grew rapidly and the artist performed several concerts. All her rap lyrics were written between 2013 and 2016²⁴. Beyond the lyrics *Min ha^{aa}-i* "It's my right", *Il-unūta fikr w- 'a^{al}* "Femininity is intelligence and intellect" and *Ana miš sigāra* "I am not a cigarette" analyzed below, we also mention *Il-kāmel inta* "You are perfect", *Hurriyyat-i*, "My freedom" *Sakte w-miš sakte* "I am silent or I am not silent".

The three texts taken into consideration are transcribed²⁵ and translated below:

Text 1

Min ha^{aa}-i

ħa-b^{aa} guz' min il-ħa^{aa} miš bass min il-sirāb
 lissa fakra l-tabr^{aa} w-l-ġīma w-l-ḍabāb
 ħa-^{aa}ūl ḥāġāt kūr ^{aa}ālū-li šibh mistaḥīla
 min ha^{aa}-i agri l-ṣubḥ badri min ġēr ta' l^{aa}āt fašīla
 fī-ha ēh arkaḥ agla w-ma-yit^{aa}āl-š di bit habla

23. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/01/egypt-rapper-mayam-mahmoud>.

24. From 2016 to today there is no news of new songs.

25. The etymologically long vowels, in post-tonic open syllable, are transcribed, only when they are pronounced as such (therefore according to a phonetic and non-phonemic transcription), so the final vowels, which in classical Arabic are long, are made short. Note that /q/ is transcribed ^{aa} to make the

ʔab lēh ʿalašān albes fuṣṭān yib^qa lāzem munāsaba?
 miš ʔa-mūt la-ḥadd ma afham mafhūm il-ḥurriyya
 ḥurriyyet-i wāgeb ʿalē-k ^qab'l ma tib^qa ha^qa leyya
 ya abū-ya willa aḥū-ya willa gūz-i hterem-ni
 fakker w-is'al nafs-ak marra ēh ta'rīf il-ʿayša l-murra
 tirodd ti^qūl-li iḥna šar^q miš ʿayšīn barra
 il-ḥuṣūṣiyya bardo ʔa^q-i w-lāzem tiḥterem
 ana miš milkiyya ʿamma bitzīdu ʿalē-ha l-alam
 sībū-ni a'tš ḥayyat-i w-būš-i l-ḥa^qṭa
 miš min w-ana lissa ṣaḡīra biḥḥaṭṭa fi ʔarī^q-i
 ana gism-i bass milk-i miš min ʔa^q-ak tašwī-(h)
 da ana lissa ḥu^qū-i kūr fal-yis^qoṭ is-safīh
 il-ḥaṭwa l-ūla bit^qūl min ʔa^q-i inn-i ḥtār
 w-ana lē-k ʿalayya ḥammal mas'uliyet l-^qarār
 min ʔa^q-i akammel ta'līm-i la-ḥadd ma ktifi
 min ʔa^q-i abān li-l-ʿālam miš ʿayza ḥtifi
 min ʔa^q-i ḥtār šarīk miš šarīk la-ʿaylt-i
 yimši ma'āya l-ʔarī^q w-yikammel-li maṣīrat-i
 min ʔa^q-i ḥū-ya yiḥterem-ni ma-yihāgem-š
 miš barra yi^qūl ḥurriyya w-ʿand-i yigi yi^qūl hēš
 miš ʔa-mūt la-ḥadd ma afham mafhūm il-ḥurriyya
 ḥurriyyat-i wāgeb ʿalē-k ^qab'l ma tib^qa ha^qa leyya

“It’s My Right”

I will be a part of reality, not only part of the mirage.
 I’m still thinking of the gasp, the cloud, and the fog.
 I will say many things that they told me that are almost impossible.
 I have the right to go running early in the morning without silly comments.
 What will happen if I ride a bike without it being said: “This stupid girl!”
 Why, when I wear a dress, does it need to be a special occasion?
 I won't die until I know the definition of freedom.
 Even before it's my right, my freedom is your duty.
 My father, my brother, or my husband: Respect me!
 Just ask yourself once: what is the definition of the bitter life?
 You'll respond by telling me that we're Middle Easterners, not foreigners.
 My privacy is my right and you must respect it.

occlusive laryngeal [ʔ], according to the method used, among others, by Kassab (1987). In some terms, the pronunciation of this consonant coincides with that of the classic and is transcribed *q*.

I am not a public possession. You increase my pain.
 Let me live my life with my true face.
 You've been planning out the path of my life since I was a little girl.
 My body is mine alone and it isn't yours to disfigure.
 I still have a lot of rights, so down with the stupid!
 The first step, you say, is that I have the right to choose
 and that I will carry the responsibility for my decision.
 I have the right to complete my education until I'm fully satisfied.
 I have the right to show myself to the world. I don't want to disappear.
 I have the right to choose my own partner and not my family's choice
 to share the road with me and to help me complete my journey.
 I have the right to have my brother respect me and not attack me.
 Outside he talks about freedom and comes to me he says "shut up"
 I won't die until I know the definition of freedom.
 Even before it's my right, my freedom is your duty.

Text 2

Il-unūsa fikr w-'aql

Il-banāt fi mugtam^ʿ-na mit^ʿassemīn
 fi l-higāb w-fi l-niqāb fi bēn il-bēnēn
 fi ^ʿaḍyā kṯir hāwālē-na mitwa^ʿafa ^ʿala l-bint
^ʿala libs-ha w ^ʿala šakl-ha w-da ašlan miš šart
 izzāy btiḥkom ^ʿalayya min ša^ʿr-i willa ṯarḥat-i
 law yōm baššēt ^ʿalayya miš ana lli ḥa-dāri kasfet-i
 bit^ʿakes w-btiḥarraš šāyef ann-ak šaḥḥ miš ḡalaṯ
 law ḥatta bass bi-l-kalām di miš mi^ʿaksa da zalaṯ
 miš libsⁱ-na l-ḡalaṯ bass il-fikr illi zāḡ
 aywa sa^ʿāt byib^ʿa ziyāda bass il-rākk ^ʿa-l-dimāḡ
 bi-naḡra wāḥda bitingereḥ ḥatta l-naḡra miš min ḥa^ʿl-ak
 btib^ʿa miḥtāḡ titfaḍḍaḥ w-tiḍreb ^ʿalamēn ^ʿa-wušš-ak
 mafḥūm il-^ʿunūṯa fi Maṣr mit^ʿassem la-ḥāḡtēn
^ʿand il-rāḡel ḡēr il-sitt w-il-tnēn ḡaltānēn
 mīn illi ^ʿāl fi yōm anna l-unūsa fi l-fasāṯin
 il-unūsa fikr w-^ʿaql kamān tarbiyya w-dīn
 waṣalt anna l-bint ma-^ʿand-ha-š si^ʿa fi nafs-ha
 bada^ʿt tiḥoṯṯ full makup tilbes ilwān fō^ʿ ba^ʿḍ-ha
 il-miškila miš fi bint il-mawḍū^ʿ ḥāḡa tānya
 fi l-muḡtama^ʿ illi byi^ʿtor ^ʿalē-na fi kull sānya
 law sa^ʿalna hal il-banāt ^ʿand-ha zō^ʿ fi-l-libs

aywa ṭabaʿan ʿanda-hom bass il-ḥayāt ma-titwaṣṣef-š
 il-ḥayāt baʿit mādiyya w-kull-o ʿāyiz hāga tiʿīš
 il-ġāli taman-o fī w-kamān aḥla min il-raḥīš.

“Femininity is intelligence and intellect”

Girls in our society are divided
 Into those who wear the niqab, those who wear the veil and those who are
 in between
 There are a lot of cases that depend on the girl
 How she dresses and how she look but this is not the rule
 How can you judge me by my hair or by my veil
 If one day you look at me I'm not the one who will hide my shame
 You harass and provoke thinking this is right not wrong
 Even if these are words this is not just a harassment, these are stones
 It is not her clothing that is wrong but it is the thought that has deviated
 from the truth
 Sometimes it's too much but it all depends on the brain
 With just one look you hurt, even the look is not your right
 You deserve to be dishonored and give two slaps in the face
 Did you understand that femininity in Egypt is divided into two parts
 There is a difference between what men and women consider and both are
 wrong
 Who said one day that femininity is in clothes?
 Femininity is about intelligence and intellect and also education and reli-
 gion
 I've become a girl who doesn't have self-confidence
 I've started to wear full make-up and wear colors on top of each other
 The problem is not with the girl, the point is an other
 The problem is with the society that influences the girl every second
 If you ask girls if they have good taste in dressing, they will say yes we
 have
 But our lives can not be described, our lives have become very
 materialistic
 And everyone wants something that would endure
 What is expensive has its value and is better than what is cheap

Text 3

Ana miš sigāra

ʿayzīn qānūn yiḥalli l-mitbaʿtar yitlam
 ʿayzīn il-qānūn illi yibʿid ʿan banāt-na kull il-hamm
 ḥa-tiʿūl-li fī qānūn ḥa-ʿūl-lak fēn yāʿam?

‘adam il-taf‘īl ma‘ il-wugūd zay l-šahṣ il-šamm
 ana miš sigāra miš zay ma bit⁹ūl ‘alayya
 miš aḥr-i dōsa willa ḥa-asīb-ek tahīn fī-yya
 miš karāfat-o tiḥno⁹ bass tiḥallī-k miḥtaram
 w-lēh ašlan ana ḥa-‘aref-ak law kunt ‘adīm il-iḥtirām
 ‘omr-ak fakkart tiḥoṭṭ nafs-ak makān bint fi l-šāre‘
 ḥāssa anna-ha farīsa w-‘ammāla fī ḥaṭwet-a ti-sāre‘
 la w-kamān law ḥadd ‘ākes-a bitgību l-ḡalaṭ
 miš miḥtarama law raddēti ḥatta karāmt-ak ḥa-tihīni-ha
 šwayye min-na šayfīn il-ḥall fi l-ḡaṭa
 w-an law l-bint iddārit miš ḥa-tkūn mitmarmāṭa
 māši ḥallīna ma‘ ā-hom li-l-aḥer w-‘ayza as‘āl-hom su‘āl
 mīn aktar balad fī-ha ḥirmān? Afḡānistān
 iṭḥakkem inta fi nafs-ak ma tiṭḥakkem-š fī-yya
 law nūr il-šams ḥabs-ak ⁹urb-ak min-ni aziyya
 di-l-wa⁹ti bān le-na mīn illi ‘alē-h il-ḥa⁹⁹
 w-mīn lamma i⁹ūl ana šāḥḥ ḥa-ni⁹ūl-o la
 itkallema ma-nti šōt-ek ‘āli min zamān
 heddi l-ḥīṭān da inti mašdar kull il-amān
 inti lli ḍaḥḥēti bi-ṭumūḥ-ek ‘šān tarbī l-‘iyāl
 ašān ta⁹dīm il-waṣīfa ikūn fi-h šarṭ il-gamāl
 inti lli ḥayāt-ek mit⁹assema taḍhiya w-stiḡlāl
 bigawwizū-ki šāḥeb il-māl badal illi ⁹alb-ek li-h mayyāl
 min w-hiyye šḡayyara biḥāfez ‘ala šakl-ha
 ‘alašān lāzem tib⁹a ḥēlwa w kill-o iḡīr min-ha
 w-btikber il-bannūta tib⁹a šāṭra fī dirāsa
 bardo lissa miš kifāya iḥna ‘ayzīn-lek gawāza
 mišṭalaḥāt tit⁹alleb law miḥtarema tib⁹a ḥayba
 law iḡtimā‘iyya w-lē-ha dōr tib⁹a ‘ala-ṭūl
⁹ūli yalli sāyeb-ni w-māši ‘āyiz-ni lēh ḥattēt dīkūr
 w-yōm ma bṭāleb b-ḥa⁹⁹-i tiwaddī-ni li-l-duktūr
 ma ti⁹ūl-li inta mīn willa šāyef nafs-ak lēh

“I am not a cigarette”

We want laws that bring order out of chaos
 We want laws that keep our girls away from worries
 You will say that there is already a law, but where, uncle
 Even if exisite is not performed and is like the deaf person
 I’m not a cigarette, I’m not like what you say about me

In the end I cannot be trampled and I won't let you offend me
 I'm not a tie that strangles but makes you look respectable
 Why should I know you if you are not worthy of respect
 Have you ever thought about putting yourself in the shoes of a girl on the street?
 The feeling is of being a prey, her pace is quickening
 And even if it comes to harass her, blame her for the mistake
 You are not respectful if you answer, even your dignity will offend
 Some of us see the solution in covering (with the veil)
 If the girl hides (behind a veil) she will not be in trouble
 Come on, let's follow them to the end and I want to ask them a question
 Which country has the most illegal acts? Afghanistan
 Control yourself and don't control me
 If the sunlight is holding you back, being close to me is bad
 Now it has appeared to us who is wrong
 and to whom when he says I am right we will say no!
 You speak that you have raised your voice for some time
 Break down the wall, you who are the source of all protection
 You who sacrificed your aspiration to raise the family
 (You who) to show up for work you have to be beautiful
 You who have your life divided between sacrifice and exploitation
 They give you in marriage to those who have money in exchange for the one you love
 Since she is little she has kept her image
 She must be beautiful and everyone must be jealous of her
 The girl grows up, she becomes good at studying
 But it's still not enough "we want to find you a husband"
 Concepts that change if she is respectful fails
 If she is sociable and she plays a role immediately her nature is libertine
 Tell me that you leave me and go away why did you put me as an ornament?
 And when I ask for my rights, you take me to the doctor
 Tell me who you are, why don't you see yourself as you are?

THEMATIC AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Mayam Mahmoud has earned many fans interested in her talent and in the themes covered in her songs: in particular the artist deals with the theme of sexual

harassment, a local taboo²⁶. In her lyrics, the rapper condemns Egyptian society for accepting harassment as part of daily life and for blaming women rather than men and hopes her rap will encourage others to follow her example.

The songs focus above all on the denunciation of the condition of the Arab woman in general and Egyptian in particular, on her rights often trampled on. Mayam claims the right of women to choose how to dress, what studies to do, what job to undertake and who to marry.

In her lyrics the reference to female solidarity (a typical trait of female rap) is strong: the artist encourages other women not to submit to a certain vision imposed by men and society. The message of her songs is a push for other women to openly express the injustices suffered, with the hope that the harsh reality will change.

The singer also addresses men directly, fathers, brothers, husbands, criticizing their actions and asking directly that their attitudes change.

From a linguistic point of view the artist uses only colloquial Arabic, in fact we find in her songs the characteristics of the Egyptian Arabic of Cairo²⁷ both on a phonetic and morpho-syntactic level.

In the analyzed texts we find:

- the interdental consonants /t̪/, /d̪/ are rendered by dentals /t/ e /d/ or sibilans /s/ and /z/.
- the phoneme /ǧ/ is pronounced g [g]
- the phoneme /q/ is rendered ' [ʔ] except in rare cases where it is realized as uvular q with terms related to the legal sphere;
- the rendering of the morpheme of the nominal feminine ʔ is -a; in 'idāfa it becomes -et;
- the etymologically long vowel in a tonic closed syllable is shortened (-CvC-).
- paroxitone accent in the sequence -vCCCv (for example: *madrása*);
- demonstrative themes *da*, *di*, *dōl* are postponed;
- poslocation of interrogative adverbs;
- reflexive pronouns constructed with *nafs* (+suffix pronoun);
- the negation of the conjugated verb forms is *ma-fa'al-š/ ma-yif'il-š*; in the preverbal forms is *miš ha-/ammāl*;

26. Harassment is an endemic problem in Egypt: According to a United Nations survey published in April 2013, 99.3% of Egyptian women reported having experienced sexual harassment, with 91% saying they feel insecure on the street.

27. On Egyptian Arabic there is an extensive bibliography of studies and manuals including: Badawi. *Mustawayyāt al-'arabiyya al-mu'āšira fī Miṣr*; Haeri. "Synchronic variation in Cairene Arabic"; Woidich. "Egypt"; Jomier et Khouzam. *Manuel d'arabe égyptien*.

— the concomitant present is rendered by *'ammāl/'ammāla*.

Regarding the derived forms of the verb found in the texts we highlight: for the II form both the scheme *fa'el- yifa'el* and *fa'al- yifa'al* with the / a / due to the proximity of /d/, /s/, /t/, /t/, /g/, /h/, /h/; the same thing for the V form *itfa'el*, *yitfa'el* and *itfa'al- yitfa'al* for the same phonetic reasons as above.

At the lexical level we find the typical features of the Egyptian Arabic:

badri: “soon”;

aywa: “yes”;

barra: “out”;

'ala tūl: “all straight”;

di-l-wa^qti: “now”;

bardo: “also”;

fēn: “where?”;

lēh: “why?”;

ēh: “what?”;

izzāy: “how?”;

w-yōm ma: “since when”;

ḥāga, ḥāgāt with the meaning “thing” (in standard Arabic: “need”);

the term *ṣgīra* “little” becomes *ṣugayyara* (from the scheme of the diminutive *fu'ayyal*);

the verb “to want” is rendered by *'āyiz/'ayza/'ayzīn*;

the verb *baqiya/yibqa* “to become” is used with the meaning “to be”; this usage is very common among Cairo speakers;

We find only one case of trasglossia: the singer uses English in the expression “full makup” (text 2).

Regarding the loans we find *dīkūr* “decor”, “ornament” (text 3), loan acclimatized from French “*décor*”.

Among the colloquial terms and expressions we highlight:

il-bannūta “the little girl”, diminutive (scheme *fa'ūl*) of *bint*;

bit short form typical of slang from *bint* “girl” (text 1);

hēš onomatopoeia with the sense of “shut up”(text 1);

alamēn lit. “two pens” (text 2), but in Egyptian colloquial Arabic it means with the meaning of “two slaps”;

the expression *il-rākk 'a-l-dimāg* lit. “the base is in the brain” (text 2) indicates that everything depends on the brain;

the way of saying *il-mitba'ṭar yitlam* (text 3) is very common and has the meaning of “to make order”, (lit. “the scattered is collected”), *mitba'ṭar* participle of II form of the quatriconsonantal verb *taba'tara* (in standard Arabic *taba'tara*);

mitmarmāṭa lit.: “muddy, bogged down” term used in colloquial jargon with the sense of being in a difficult situation (text 3);

illi ʿalb-ek li-h mayyāl (text 3) has the meaning of “one that you like, that your heart loves”;

the way of saying *ʿāyiz-ni lēh ḥattēt dīkūr* “you put me as an ornament” indicates someone who is silent and must not act, someone who is treated like an object (text 3).

Regarding style, Mayam’s language is very direct and describes images and situations of everyday life of girls often judged if they dress well, booed if they ride a bicycle or harassed in the streets. Although sometimes very harsh and blunt, the artist’s language is not vulgar and does not resort to foul language.

The rhymes that Mayam uses are for the most part final, but we also observe assonances and internal rhymes.

The syntactic rhetorical figure of the anaphora is often used, in fact the author repeats at the beginning of the verses the same word. The rapper also uses the morphological rhetorical figure of alliteration, repeating the same phonemes in subsequent words.

In the artist’s texts we observe similes and metaphors, as in the verse *law ḥatta bass bi-l-kalām di miš mi ʿāksa da zalaṭ* “even if these are words this is not just a harassment, these are stones” (text 2), with the clear sense: even if these are just words, they hurt and are heavy as stones thrown at someone. The third text is all about metaphors and similes right from the title *ana miš sigāra* which alludes to woman as an object that is used and thrown away: *ana miš sigāra* “I am not a cigarette”; *miš aḥr-i dōsa* “in the end I cannot be trampled”, here there is always the comparison with the cigarette with the sense of something that is exploited to the end and then thrown away and trampled on; *miš karāfat-o tiḥno^a bass tiḥallī-k miḥtaram* “I’m not a tie that strangles but makes you look respectable”, with this image the artist means that the tie, a metaphor here for women, is not used to tighten the neck but to make the man look elegant; *ʿadam il-tafʿīl ma ʿ il-wuḡūd zay l-šāḥṣ il-šamm* “even if it exists it is not performed and is like the deaf person” (lit.: “the lack of its implementation (of the law) even if it exists is like a deaf person”), here the comparison with the deaf person has the following meaning: even if the laws exist, the fact that they are not carried out makes them useless.

We encounter rhetorical questions such as *ṭab lēh ʿalašān albes fuṣṭān yib^a lāzem munāsaba?* “why, when I wear a dress, does it need to be a special occasion?” (text 1), *mīn illi ʿāl fi yōm anna l-unūsa fi fasāṭīn?* “who said one day that femininity is in clothes?” (text 2), *ḥa-ti^aūl-li fi qānūn ḥa-^aūl-ak fēn yā ʿam?* “you will say that there is already a law, but where, uncle?” (text 3), *ma ti^aūl-li inta mīn*

willa šāyef nafs-ak lēh? (text 3) “tell me who you are, why don’t you see yourself as you are?” and verses with direct speech: *fī-ha ēh arkab agla w-ma-yit⁴āl-š dī bit habla* “what will happen if I ride a bike without it being said: This stupid girl!” (text 1), *miš barra yi⁹ūl hurriyya w-‘and-i yigi yi⁹ūl hēš* “outside he talks about freedom and comes to me he says: Shut up”, *ya abū-ya willa aḥū-ya willa gūz-i hterem-ni* “my father, my brother, or my husband: Respect me!”(text 1). *bardo lissa miš kifāya iḥna ‘ayzīn-lek gawāza* “But it’s still not enough: We want to find you a husband” (text 3).

CONCLUSION

Female rappers are starting to be successful and are becoming quite numerous in Arab countries as well.

While there is much research on the analysis of the birth and development of Western female rap, in-depth studies that investigate this reality in the Arab world from different points of view, linguistic, sociological and cultural, are lacking.

From this preliminary study it appears that the themes of Arab women rappers are in line with the topics faced by most of the female rappers in the world (referring to the most politically committed rap, not the commercial one): political issues related to their own country and social issues such as the condition of women, the denunciation of sexism, the reality experienced daily. In general from the texts found on web, the language, expressed in their songs, is more aggressive and direct than that used within society on a daily basis, in contrast to the general stereotype of what is expected of a female language.

In the Arab world we can say that in the rap musical scenario, although it remains mostly male prerogative, there is no total hostility towards female rappers, in fact they are often encouraged and supported by some singers and there are several mixed collaborations between women and men rappers.

Specifically, the work focused on three texts by the young Egyptian singer Mayam Mahmoud, who became internationally famous. The artist mainly deals with social issues related to the situation of the Arab woman in general and the Egyptian woman in particular. In her lyrics through a very frank and direct language she expresses all the difficulties and injustices suffered by the girls including the burning issue of sexual harassment in the streets. Both the theme of the condition of women and that of solidarity can be found in many Arab women rappers but also in female rap in the world.

Regarding the language the singer expresses herself in *‘āmmiyya*, employing the Egyptian dialect in all her songs and does not resort to loans or *trasmios* except in rare cases. Through the linguistic analysis it was considered appropriate to mention the morpho-syntactic and lexical aspects, as well as reporting the collo-

quial expressions and idioms to offer further light on the contemporary Egyptian Arabic, albeit already sufficiently investigated.

In her texts Mayam uses rhetorical figures such as: anaphora, repetitions, assonances, consonances, metaphors and similes. Puns were not found because the author prefers a very clear and unambiguous language, and uses images and descriptions of real situations of everyday life.

In the future, in addition to increasing and deepening a study on female rap in the Arab world from a socio-linguistic point of view, it would be interesting to analyze the videos of the artists, also examining the field of communication and non-verbal language.

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