

**Tracking the Narrative: The Poetics of Identity in Rap Music and Hip-hop  
Culture in Capé Town.**

**by**

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the**

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### **Declaration**

I, Lee William Watkins, hereby declare that the content of this dissertation is entirely my own work.

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Last, the hip-hoppers in Cape Town and everywhere else. May you be forever young.

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## **Glossary**

**B-boying:** dancing.

**Breaking ;** dancing.

**B(break)-boy/b-girl :** dancer.

**Beat-boxing :** Drum-like sounds made by mouth.

**Dissing :** to issue criticism.

**Dope :** work of high calibre.

**Graffiti :** carries derogatory connotations for certain hip-hoppers. Generally they prefer to use the term “spraycan art”.

**Mc/emcee :** singing/rapping.

**Piece :** a spraypainting or tag.

**Wack :** means either good or bad, depending on context.



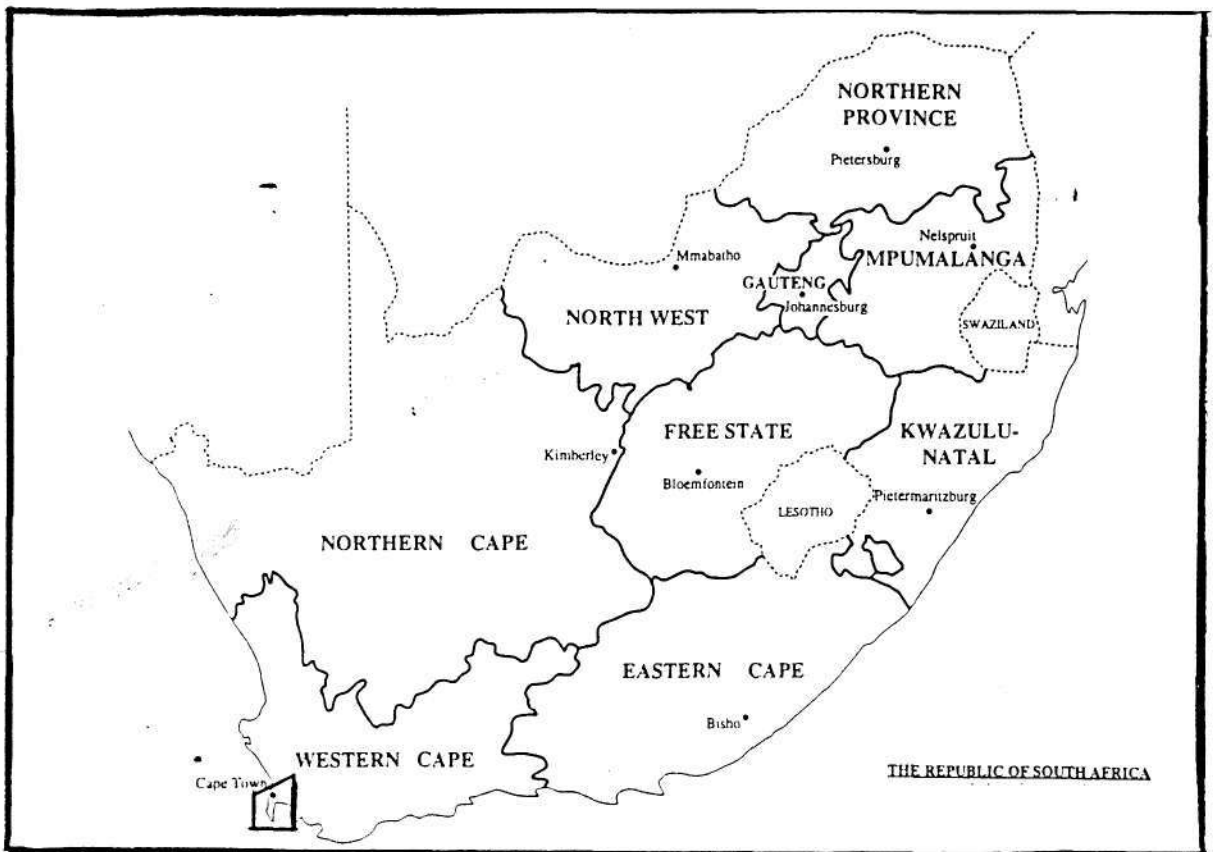
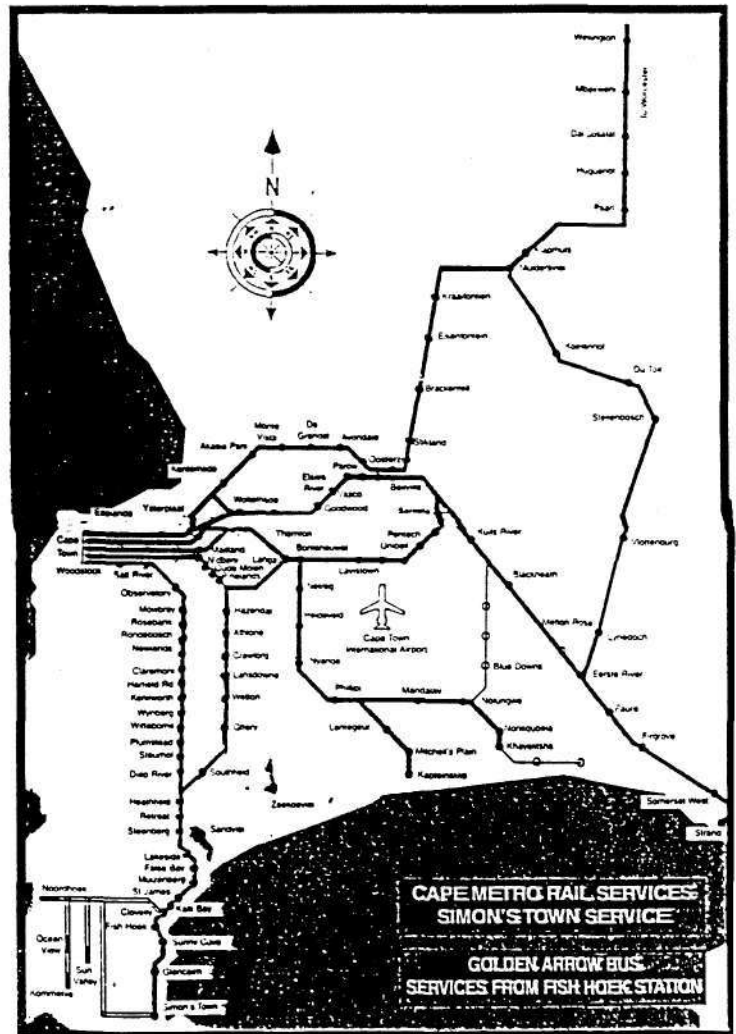


Figure 1

Figure 2



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Section A

##### Hip-hop performance: Place and power

*When hip-hop started it was not just for the kids, it was for everybody. It's like...something that was 'negative...a brother that was a member of a gang, and he changed the whole idea in the South Bronx to something that was positive. He realised that it's senseless killing each other, now we're trying to do the same...to build that same network in South Africa. But with us, we've been brainwashed so much through our history, our schooling and whatever. It's like...always try to put a brother down...you know in your mind...someone's at least trying something...but just for the hell of it I'm going to put you down. But it's because we don't know our past, we don't know where we come from. Hip-hop brought that to us, even though we know there's going to be boundaries ahead, we're going to try to get over those boundaries. (Interview with Black Noise member, Gavin: October 1997. Fish Hoek)*

Since the early 1980s coloured youths who inhabit the margins of Cape Town have been using rap music and other aspects of hip-hop culture as a form of political strategy and pleasure. Rap music and hip-hop were initially associated with resistance politics and coloured youths. Today, rappers increasingly embrace issues that are of importance to the post-apartheid generation, such as nation-building, the car you drive or the person you *smaak* (fancy).

All over the world hip-hop speaks to the concerns of marginalised youths. It is thus easy to assume that the manifestation of hip-hop in Cape Town is the same as hip-hop among marginalised youths in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Seoul, Tunisia, and the USA. Yet, hip-hop in Cape Town is not entirely the same as hip-hop anywhere else since its style and politics are a unique constellation of local and global social concerns, and local and global musical elements.

Around the globe hip-hop articulates perceptions of place. The common thread running through these disparate localities is that hip-hoppers use the music, break-dancing, painting, and control over technology, as a source of strength in their struggle against exclusion from the domains of power. The power derived from participation in hip-hop represents a concrete denial of the powerlessness experienced outside the hip-hop community. Their actions symbolise affirmation and through symbolic behaviour (performance) hip-hoppers transform themselves from victims to victors. The process in which agency is displayed so profoundly is cyclical. Barthes' reading of poetics is pertinent to the experiences of hip-hoppers in Cape Town. For him, the "poetic" is the

"form's symbolic capacity; and this capacity has value only if it permits the form to depart in many directions and thereby potentially to manifest the infinite advance of the symbol, which one can never make into a final signified and which is, in short, always the signifier of another signifier" (1986:124)

In this dissertation I propose that Cape Town's hip-hoppers, the progeny of coloured people displaced under apartheid, use the performance of rap music and break-dance, as the primary means of recovering and maintaining a form of power in a space of subordination. I maintain, moreover, that the process of transformation is enacted within a context shaped by different associations and different strategies. The socio-political environment hip-hoppers inhabit informs the strategies they adopt and conditions in it are further challenged by the power developed through participation in hip-hop. The space in hip-hop is maintained by constant dialogue with the outside. This dialogue is cyclical and uneven. In view of the above, I will examine how knowledge wielded by hip-hoppers is discursively constituted, controlled and established as a basis for the construction of Cape Town's hip-hop community (Middleton 1990:7). My hypothesis is supported by Fabian, who regards performance as action that flows from a number of actors working together to give form to experiences, ideas, feelings, and projects (1990:13).

Hip-hop's unifying potential is one of its strongest sources of appeal among marginalised youths. In Cape Town, however, not only does it unify, but it re-inforces boundaries, even among marginalised youths. Hip-hoppers interpret social conditions in their immediate

environment as mediated through the experiences of apartheid and racial hegemony. Responses to this situation are marred by ideological discord. I therefore regard the study of hip-hop and rap music performance as the investigation of the tension generated by hip-hoppers who associate and disassociate with one another. By asserting different identities and by following diverse strategies hip-hoppers inevitably transform their space into a place with multiple boundaries. Within hip-hop itself these boundaries create places in which differences exist face to face. Thus hip-hop is a cultural space in which differences are heightened, produced side by side and in competition with each other (Bhabha 1995:15).

The struggle of identification and strategic movement in Cape Town's hip-hop community adds to its complexity. This is manifested in the political orientations of hip-hoppers, and in the relationship between hip-hop and South African society at large. Music, dancing, painting, and technology are used to construct a landscape in which power is constantly negotiated, contested, mediated, and appropriated. The tension that flows from here is revealed in the interplay of the political, social and racial textualities that prevail within the rap music scene in Cape Town.

The main contention in hip-hop revolves around colour consciousness. Since its inception in the 1970s hip-hop in the USA has been associated with black nationalism and the black diaspora. Similarly, the presence of hip-hop in Cape Town can be explained, to a large extent, by the discourse of ethnicity. By identifying and mobilising themselves as coloured or black, Cape Town's hip-hoppers have embedded ethnicity in a class struggle of global proportions. People in Africa, and in other parts of the developing world, are increasingly marginalised by the intensification of global capitalism. This situation has given rise to new social and cultural movements, such as hip-hop:

*LW: How do you explain the presence of hip-hop in Cape Town?*

*Deon: The whole movement basically enlightens people, so there's a lot of people in western countries and especially white people that are coming to terms with themselves because we're living in the age of truth now, where a lot of things are being exposed, so people, or white kids can see how their parents have and forefathers have fucked them over mentally as well. Basically what the world demands is that the people should be fair*

*with one another on a global scale. White people should come to terms with the evil that they and their foreparents have done, and if they truly want to compensate or come to some sort of racial harmony...it's much more than a simple verbal apology. Because you can pay people also on an economical scale because there is not much you can do with I'm sorry and your black arse is still in the gutter. It's also a visual and vibrant culture, and people like the vibe, they like rhythm. Especially white people, a lot of them don't have natural rhythm and they struggle to dance and get into the beat. They're fascinated and they want to be a part of it. (Interview: October 1997: Cape Town)*

Hip-hoppers organise themselves as crews. My research is focussed on three crews and a number of individuals who have been involved in hip-hop since its inception. Each crew, in its own way, imputes the movement with vigour. Prophets of Da City (better known as POC) has a long and colourful history. POC members who participate in the narrative are Deon and Shaheen. Black Noise has dedicated itself to youth and community development. Members conduct workshops regularly and perform more frequently and more widely than any other hip-hop crew. Members who availed themselves are Emile, Gavin, and Angelo.

Grave Diggers' Productions (GDP) introduce an alternative and tense voice into the fabric of the dissertation. From them I have gained valuable insight into youth and hip-hop politics on the Cape Flats. While most hip-hoppers assert their "blackness", GDP members assert their "colouredness". GDP informants are Raoul, John, Sparrow, and Ice. I include the voices of two other individuals. They are Phat (Ashley) and Ferdie. Phat is a member of *Brasse Vannie Kaap* (BVK, "Brothers of the Cape"[ trans.]). This crew is popular on the Cape Flats and in the mainstream media. Ferdie has been involved in the hip-hop scene for some time and is the editor of a hip-hop magazine called "Mobshop".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are a few isolated voices not mentioned above. Where appropriate, I will indicate their place within the movement.

## **Section B**

### **Tracking the narrative**

One of the challenges of writing an ethnography lies in the process of gradually prying loose those concerns and issues that the researcher, subjectively and objectively, tries to make sense of. Sometimes this unpicking falls within the realm of existing fieldwork studies; sometimes the researcher will accidentally stumble upon a field or opportunity overlooked by others. Issues that appear marginal may become central to the narrative. The study of hip-hop has presented all of these possibilities, and consequently, a great deal of framing is required.

#### **1. Methodology**

##### **a. Personal experience**

My interest in hip-hop and rap is motivated by the close association it has with the struggle against apartheid and after 1990, with community development. Having been both a community worker and teacher on the Cape Flats I have had the opportunity of combining my skills as a musician with politics. For more than ten years I taught music at secondary and primary schools in the Cape Flats and shared with colleagues the difficult task of trying to teach children whose parents were involved in drug peddling and other criminal activities.

I live on the border of the Cape Flats, in a small middle class area located next to a railway line, at the foot of the southern part of the Table Mountain range. During the 1980s I was a member of various community arts projects, civic organisations, and, until my departure from the workplace in the late 1990s, an active member of a trade union for educators. During the struggle against apartheid, songs of mobilisation and information were written or often appropriated from oppressed communities in other parts of the world. Many of these songs reflected immediate concerns such as corrupt housing authorities and the failing education system. Other songs were a direct challenge to the apartheid government. As with the civil rights movement in the USA, our music became an act of physical, emotional and

social commitment (Sidran 1995:17). The music was not escapist in nature, as is most popular music, but a direct reflection of the combined experiences of oppressed individuals. Rap (and reggae) represented a vital part of this experience. Rap and other aspects of hip-hop, such as the break-dancing and painting, were closely associated with the struggle against apartheid, and many cadres, writer included, identified profoundly with the movement. Not only were its sounds appealing, but so was its strategy.

I remember rappers at political rallies, dancing on the streets and spray-painting every available wall with popular demands. At schools where I taught, children often chose to display their rapping, breaking, and beat-boxing skills during open days. Groups of boys would walk around school beat-boxing, clearing any space in the classroom to rehearse their dances for the inevitable talent shows. Until fairly recently, youths at schools went as far as imitating the East Coast and West Coast conflict among gangsta-rappers in the USA. Gangsterism is rife on the Cape Flats and youths associate the violence of the conflict among gangsta-rappers in the USA with their immediate circumstances. If a hand sign from an opposing faction is used, learners would often physically attack one another. Thus, although I have never been a hip-hopper, I have experienced close contact with the movement. Through their beats and paint strokes, I feel that hip-hoppers have contributed as much to the liberation struggle as youth in other organisations.

Despite close contact with the movement, engaging in fieldwork opened up fresh challenges, as I was no longer “the teacher, the activist, the observer”. I was apprehensive at meeting my informants since I had not had close contact with young adults in a long time. Somehow, I regarded all youth as existing “out there”, immersed in the material pleasures of the world. During the struggle against apartheid, most black youths were actively involved in community affairs. Perhaps, because of my age, I identify more closely with this generation. As activists, we were frequently called upon to reject the trappings of capitalism. Since 1990 the situation has changed. It would appear that youths are more concerned with the consumption of brand names and pleasure. I have no objection to people having fun but I find it difficult to relate to behaviour that is wholly consumerist. Viewed in this light, the role that hip-hoppers have chosen for themselves, articulates to a large degree, a different

purpose. They do enjoy their lives and they do have materialistic ambitions, but, at the same time they are committed to social upliftment.

Once contact was established, I embarked on a period of intense fieldwork for about three months. My fieldwork was frustrated by the contingency of some of the interviews and performances. My frustrations were however, dwarfed by the excitement and spirit of the performances. During fieldwork I conducted interviews, and attended demonstrations, workshops, concerts and competitions. Some of these events took place at night in townships notorious for gang activity. One event took place in Pollsmoor prison, a maximum security prison and temporary home of former president Mandela, before his release in 1990.

#### **b. Telling it like it is: Ethnography and popular music**

Barthes believes that narrative is simply there, like life itself (1982:251). Indeed, everything and everyone has a story. In this dissertation, the story I tell is about hip-hoppers whose lives are enriched by knowledge and the expression of their need to cope with conditions in their environment. Their lives are, moreover, destabilised, and characterised, by failure, marginalisation, and denial. I seek to explain and interpret these elements by describing hip-hop in Cape Town as a narrative in which the discourse is discursively constructed between myself and informants. I deem the narrative discursive because it consists of proposals, representations and significations held apart and together by the tension innate to creating a text that is essentially multi-vocal. A text that is embedded in the social relations of the production and consumption of a particular musical style. The text will reveal that social relations in hip-hop are determined by the exchange and collusion of ideas and strategies.

The narrative is a performative process, a story with structural elements such as plot, setting, place, characters and temporality (Denzin 1997:158). I am one of the characters. The other characters are the hip-hoppers. Their voices are mediated by history and culture, and as interpretations and evaluations of their participation in the movement. This process enables them to develop the capacity to understand and evaluate their actions (Mohanty 1995:233).



In the narrative I retain, as far as possible, the practice of substantiating whatever I observe and interpret with as much dialogue as possible. I do so for the following reason: in anthropology and ethnomusicology a great deal has been written about how dialogical ethnographies emancipate (to a degree) the author and subject from the relationship of domination and subordination (see Feld 1987, Grenier and Guilbault 1990, Marcus and Fischer 1986, Ulin 1991). Hence the kind of polyphony I attempt in this dissertation is a means of obtaining perspectival relativity rather than an attempt at eluding authorial responsibility (Willis 1997:121-129).

A number of factors influence the dialogic spirit of the dissertation. Among these I believe, is my gender. In Cape Town, hip-hop crews are male; women are largely absent from the productive processes of hip-hop. I believe an essential reason why I was granted access to the intimate views expressed by crew members is that I am male. Having said this, let me add that hip-hoppers vehemently oppose discrimination against women.

Second, being black, or “coloured”, means that I share with the crews a common language and habitat. I understand their language and know the areas where they live. As researcher then, I am doubly privileged. Third, rap is an oppositional voice. In the face of political constraints, hip-hoppers have always asserted the right to freely express themselves. They are not intimidated by authority, including my own. Informants willingly shared their knowledge and experiences.

I emphasise that rap music and hip-hop are created, used and interpreted differently by different individuals and crews. The dialogue is not only between myself and hip-hoppers, it flows from the interactions among hip-hoppers themselves. For this reason the narrative will show the extent to which hip-hop involves collective practices and negotiated identities. I will not merely reflect upon, represent or reveal aspects of hip-hop, but also translate and write about the modalities in and around hip-hop’s performance practices.

Essentially this dissertation is a study of the kinds of messages that performances communicate about the participants, whether performer or audience. Central to the notion of communication in performance is the preoccupation with the discourse of dialogism.

Wheeler, for instance, uses Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to interpret the responsive interactions between two or more social processes; she examines rap as a dialogic site of class interaction (1991). She uses dialogism to account for the relationship between rap and the mainstream media, and, the relationship among performers. Rap music in the USA is seen as a response to white dominance, and as a forum for the display of power among hip-hoppers. Dialogism underpins my understanding of communication and representation in hip-hop performance.

The other dimension of ethnographies on music is that music is often used as an explanation for social behaviour and social processes (see Feld 1984, Keil 1979, Coplan 1987, 1994, Erlmann 1991, 1994, 1996). Similarly, this study of rap music is integrated into a general understanding of social behaviour. The hip-hop scene in Cape Town is complexly layered and politically charged. Studying the performance of rap music and break-dance has opened up a variety of issues, the result of which is a substantial volume of fieldwork data.

Last, since the study of rap music and hip-hop has hitherto been excluded from scholarship on popular music in South Africa the onus rests on me to develop, first, an understanding of the social, cultural and personal meanings implicated in the production and consumption of rap music, and second, a framework for criticising and evaluating rap music in a manner that takes account of its specificities (Shepherd 1994:195).

## **2. Literature review**

Although hip-hop in Cape Town has been the subject of numerous newspaper articles and inserts on television entertainment programmes for adolescents, there are, to my knowledge, no published academic sources that investigate its musical and social importance. Scholars have tended to emphasise the musical experiences of the Malay choirs, to the exclusion of most other musical activities in the Western Cape. Generally however, there is a paucity in research on popular music in the Western Cape. The reason is that until about ten years ago, tertiary institutions (of which there are three) in the Western Cape focussed on the study of Western Classical music.

In Cape Town scholarly research on folk music<sup>2</sup> is largely confined to the music of Malay descendants (see Du Plessis 1939, Kirby 1939, Van Warmelo 1979); the influence of Malay descendants on Afrikaans *liedjies* (songs), (Du Plessis 1935); and, on the relationship between music and slavery (Coplan 1985).<sup>3</sup> A second area of research folk music is on Afrikaans *liedjies* (see Boshoff and Du Plessis 1918, Bouws 1958), and séance music in the black townships of Cape Town (Coppenhall 1991). The latest publication on an aspect of cultural behaviour in Cape Town is Martin's comprehensive description of the coon carnival in Cape Town (1999). He describes the musical influences and style, as well as the history and cultural significance of the carnival. Layne's study of dance bands and jazz in Cape Town in the period after the second world war, is another substantive contribution (1995). Howard's study of music and identity in the Malay choir (1994) is another contribution to the study of traditional music. Apart from the work of Martin, Layne, Howard, and Coppenhall, I realise that there is not enough research on popular music for me to build upon. Thus I have had to use research paradigms developed in other parts of South Africa, and abroad.

This dissertation is essentially about the performance of rap music and break-dance, and its relationship to the broad socio-political processes in the Western Cape. Erlmann observes that in the study of performance, South African ethnomusicologists have not readily taken heed of the changes that have emerged from colonial conquest, dispossession, and industrialisation (1991:2). The experiences of post-apartheid South Africa should be added to the list. Hitherto few scholars have taken up Erlmann's challenge. Ethnomusicological studies of recent times where urban music and performance are described and interpreted are Coplan (1994), Erlmann (1996), Muller (1994), and Meintjes (1997). Coplan describes the sung poetry among migrant workers from Lesotho who reside in the Witwatersrand. He illustrates how knowledge and shared understandings are communicated in performance. Muller and Meintjes examine the relationships and experiences of women in music, and

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term "folk" to include the secular and religious music of people who arrived as colonist, notably the Dutch (later known as Afrikaners) and slave, as well as those people who were indigenous to the western Cape.

<sup>3</sup> In, "In Township Tonight!", Coplan describes in abbreviated form the musical activity in the Cape during Dutch colonial rule (1985). He points to the relationship between San slaves and their masters and the effects of this relationship on musical style and performance.

describe how performance culture is mediated as an instrument of identity and self-affirmation. Erlmann focuses on the performance of *isicathamiya* in urban KwaZulu Natal. The central theme in the four works numerated above is an examination of the relationship between social structure and cultural forms, between historical process and awareness as it is dialectically constituted in performance. Much of what these scholars describe can be applied to the study of performance practices in the Western Cape.

There are a number of themes that dominate research on rap music and hip-hop. One area is the description and analyses of rap style. In his analysis of the musical elements of Public Enemy's *Fight the Power*, Walser directs his concern away from an analysis of rap lyrics (1995). He regards the musical elements, such as the rhythm, as more important than the rap, and refutes the claim made by a musician such as Wynton Marsalis that rap is not music. In addition, Walser challenges Epstein's naïve view that rap consists of "simple, syncopated rhythmic patterns and rhythmically repetitive song structures" (1994:xxiv). While there is no detailed musical analysis in the dissertation, Walser's article makes a valuable musicological contribution to the analysis of rap music and popular music in general.

The notion of a reinvented black nation is addressed by Decker (1994). He delivers an account of the recent and widespread emergence of black nationalism within rap music. He concludes that rappers draw their inspiration from the black power movements of the 1960s and maintains that the original site of African-American cultural heritage is ancient Egypt. This essay analyses rap music's engagement with the discourse of nation and, more specifically, through a critique of hip-hop "nationalism", it offers a reading of black nationalism within America. Similarly, Lusane observes that the dominant ideological trend of the rappers is black nationalism (1993). The black nationalist rhetoric of hip-hop expresses disillusionment with the black leadership in America, and serves a "liberating political paradigm in the face of surrender on the part of many political forces in the black community" (ibid:47). Similarly, many hip-hoppers in Cape Town are committed to the "Hip-hop Nation". In this case, the nation is a transnational construct where colour, that is, black consciousness, is an important criterion for participation. However, this dissertation will show that black nationalism is challenged by those hip-hoppers who emphasise their

“colouredness”. Hip-hoppers who identify themselves as “coloureds” associate rather with Latinos rather than with African-Americans.

The internal contestation in Cape Town’s hip-hop is a trend that resonates with the article by Flores (1994), where he attempts to restore the balance as far as race is concerned by challenging the notion of rap as being solely of black origin. He regards the emergence of rap as a testimony to the cultural interaction between the black and Puerto Rican communities. In terms of race and consumption, Allinson’s article on the accessibility of black sound to white people, by way of rap, is a penetrating account of how white and black relations in the USA shape patterns of participation within hip-hop (1994). These articles reveal that the relationship between music and colour is crucial to an understanding of musical behaviour. The relationship between ethnicity and power in hip-hop is the key theme that I develop in this study.

Hip-hop is about performance and agency. These processes occur within a social context, part of which I have already described. I address the social context of hip-hop in Cape Town more closely in subsequent chapters. Others who examine the social context of rap music are Danaher and Blackwelder (1994). They compare rap and blues with regard to the social milieu in which these genres emerged, the lessons to be learnt, and the potential for rap to provide the catalyst for social change. Mitchell observes that in Italy rap music is one of the main catalysts for a political renaissance spearheaded by oppositional Italian youth movements (1995). Keyes situates rap music within the context of the emergence of gang culture, a development that she views as a consequence of the physical deterioration of the Bronx in the 1950s (1996).

The controversial areas of sex, violence, and racism in rap music are explored by Berry (1990). These concerns are critiqued in relation to the social, cultural, and historical reality of urban black American youth. Rose has combined ethnographic methods with cultural theories to produce readings of rap as a set of cultural practices (1994a). She describes, theorises and initiates a critique of the social elements within rap music and hip-hop. Digging below the noise, the book is an account of rap music as socially constituted, mediated and lived.

Keyes starts with a history of rap music and hip-hop in the Bronx, and a description of its origins in disco music (1996). By analysing rap's lyrics in terms of its rhythmic importance, she links rap to what is perceived to be its original home, Africa. In keeping with the latest trends in rap consumption and production she expresses her concern, as does Lusane (1993), about the gradual incorporation of rap and hip-hop into the mainstream. Previously scholars have neglected to keep musical change in mind and she suggests that a study of rap music should consider both the socio-cultural and musical changes within which rap is contextualised. Dimitriadis describes the history of rap, its musical structure, and a theory of the body in black music and dance (1996). My description of hip-hop in Cape Town and its socio-political context resonates with the historical and musical outlines provided by the scholars listed in the paragraphs above.

All of the more important studies on rap music and hip-hop are from the USA. Exceptions are the essays of Mitchell (1995), Kopytko (1986), and Torp (1986). Mitchell looks at the emergence, style and development of rap music among Italian youths; Kopytko and Torp examine breakdance as an emblem of identity among youths in New Zealand and Denmark respectively. Hip-hop has a strong presence in African countries such as Senegal, Benin, and Tunisia. Yet it appears not to have been the subject of any research among scholars in these countries.<sup>4</sup> This dissertation appears to be the first academic tome on hip-hop and rap music in any part of Africa.

Furthermore, Byerly observes that in ethnomusicological research the emphasis on black and white musical activities have resulted in the alienation of groups like the South Africans of Indian descent, and particularly the "mixed race community registered as 'coloureds' under apartheid" (1998:39). The research presented in this dissertation is therefore an attempt to draw marginal music experiences into the ambit of research on musical performance in South Africa generally, while simultaneously addressing the concern of marginalisation as far as colour is concerned. The reality is that most hip-hoppers are "coloured". The dissertation

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<sup>4</sup> I found the citations for Torpo and Kopytko in Shepherd, J. et al. eds. 1997. Popular Music Studies: A Select International Bibliography. London. Mansell.

therefore reflects a particular reality, rather than pursuing a “coloured” or racially inspired agenda.

In the dissertation I am faced with a number of constraints. Unfortunately, space and time have limited the possibility of including many issues pertinent to rap and hip-hop. I suggest that these areas be explored in further studies. They are issues such as musical analysis, gender and rap, technology and rap, and rap music and the diaspora. At times I do refer to these issues in passing.

## Section C

### Clearing the track

#### 1. Colour

The notion of ethnicity as determined along the lines of colour, cosmetic features and behaviour, was one of the pillars of apartheid and while I respect non-racism it is unfortunately still necessary to label people as “white”, “coloured”, or “black”. In the dissertation, I will use the terms “black”, “coloured” and “white” for two reasons. First, hip-hop has to be contextualised within existing racial discourses. The dissertation is situated in the racialised, economic and social crises of post-apartheid South Africa. Hip-hop and rap first emerged in the “coloured” townships of Cape Town. At present rap music is fast spreading among youth that are not “white”. Given the nature of South African society this trend definitely has racial and class overtones. Hence when I do specify a certain group it is not to perpetuate racism but to locate rap music socially. At times I use the term “black” generically to identify and include all people that are not “white”. For this reason I identify rap music and the hip-hop movement as one inhabited by youths that are black.

Second, people in any society are divided into groups, be that defined by ethnicity, religious or political persuasions. The mythical “rainbow nation” touted by politicians today helps us to experience South Africa as a metaphor for difference as well as imagined unity. Therefore, when writing about “race” it is to pursue the notion of relativity among groups of people. By

ignoring the former analyses of musical activity are rendered less meaningful as political and social tensions strongly interface with the musical experiences on the local scene.

## **2. Hip-hop**

According to one of the pioneers of hip-hop in the USA, Bambaataa<sup>5</sup>, the word “hip-hop” may be traced to one Lovebug Starski, a South Bronx disc jockey. He was renowned for his skills and would spur dancers on with “hip-hop, you don’t stop, that makes your body rock” (Keyes 1996:231). Hip-hop emerged as a street culture and Bambaataa started using the word “hip-hop” to name this street culture. The name caught on among other followers. Bambaataa named himself after the isiZulu speaking leader as depicted in the British film of 1964, “Zulu”. Bhambatha of Zululand was the chief of the Zondi who led his people in 1906 in a revolt against white expansion. The film depicted black people as savages while the British were portrayed as a “civilising” force. In Bambaataa’s view, the Zulus were heroic warriors. He used their victory over the British to inspire his efforts in responding to racism in the USA.

Bambaataa’s concept of hip-hop is comprised of a street attitude embodied in the form of gestures and language. Other signs of this movement are revealed by the type of clothing hip-hoppers wear, by the spraycan art etched on the walls of the townships and on trains, the way in which they dance, the manner of speaking and of course, in the music.

## **3. Rap**

Rap is an abbreviation for “rapport” and is a term taken from the way that men communicate with women in the American ghettos. Historically, the concept of rapping, or talking in rhythms layered over music to a beat, can be traced from African oral traditions at the time when black people travelled as slaves to the southern states of the USA. Here it evolved into numerous oral-based expressive forms. Performers of these traditions, such as

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<sup>5</sup> The original spelling of the name is Bhambatha. The American Bambaataa, also known as Afrika Bambaataa, was born on 10 April 1960, in the Bronx. His name at birth was Kevin Donovan.



storytellers, blues singers, preachers, and toasters, are praised for their artistic skills as well as their abilities to transmit cultural values and sensibilities through performance. By the late 1920s, southern black migrants had transported their traditions to the urban north and transformed them in this new context. Rap music represents a culmination of these national and transnational oralities.

In the American ghettos, the word “rap” emerged as a form of speech practiced by men to obtain sexual favours from women. Rapping became a vehicle for re-affirming their masculinity. Men may also rap to exercise their verbal ability and to prove that they can exercise control over women (Kochman and Thomas 1990:91). Issues concerning the representation of women in rap music and the way in which men and women boast about sexual accomplishments and failures resonate with the original purpose of rapping.

#### **4. Hip-hop and language**

On the one hand, the language hip-hoppers use is a product of the cultural exchange between the people of Cape Town. They borrow and use words that come from a variety of sources, such as prison slang, township vernacular, and ebonics, for example. On the other, similarity in intonation and style with American ghetto language strengthens the dialogue between local and global styles. Hip-hop language in Cape Town is partly derived from the language African-American people use in the streets of the ghettos in the USA. This includes the use of slang and code-switching. In the USA the language is referred to as “ebonics” mainly because of its association with black people.<sup>6</sup> It is a creolised language that reinforces the identity of class and colour. An earlier name for this variant was “black English”.

In ebonics, there are various linguistic codes that are used to cement the relationships between the inhabitants of the ghetto. A prominent feature of hip-hop language is that while

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<sup>6</sup> Among linguists there is some contention as to the origin of the term. However, it is popularly accepted that “ebon” is derived from “ebony”, the black wood from Africa, and the “ics” from “phonics”, meaning sound. Hence directly translated ebonics means “black sound”.

the pronunciation may remain the same as in “standard” English, the spelling is altered. For example, where the first letter of a word starts with an *f*, it is replaced with a *ph*. A word like flow becomes *phlow*. One of the characteristics of rap music is its *phat* bass lines. Truncated words are used too; for example, flavour becomes *flava*. *Phlow* and *flava* are among the most important words of hip-hop vocabulary because they describe the essence of hip-hop style. To achieve stylistic competence, the music, painting and dancing must have *phlow* and *flava* in order to succeed. Where they occur, I retain these linguistic characteristics in my transcriptions in order to maintain the authority of my informants. Hip-hop followers in Cape Town have adopted these linguistic features while adding to it utterances peculiar to the Afrikaans vernacular on the Cape Flats and a fresh dynamism inspired by street, prison and world culture. The language hip-hoppers use is therefore a fascinating mixture of street-wise Afrikaans, English, Xhosa, Arabic, ebonics, and prison slang. In fact, BVK’s rendition of Afrikaans is being recognised by Afrikaans language institutions and the media as a unique rendition of the language.

## Content

My hypothesis is concerned with the notion that power is asserted and negotiated through the medium of performance. In the following chapter, I will contextualise rap and hip-hop within Cape Town’s social milieu. I describe the social and political processes of the city, and how these are responsible for the kinds of associations hip-hoppers construct. In chapter 3 I describe the origin of rap in the USA, and, the history of rap and hip-hop in Cape Town. The fourth chapter includes the biographies of hip-hoppers, as well as the institutional features of hip-hop, such as the relationship between the Universal Zulu Hip-hop Nation and the Nation of Islam. Hip-hoppers are supposed to be united in the Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation. However, the behaviour and expressions of hip-hoppers in Cape Town illustrate that their participation within the hip-hop movement is contested and negotiated. In this chapter I explain the circumstances surrounding the dissonances and consonances within Cape Town’s hip-hop scene.

In the fifth chapter I interpret the utterances and behaviour of hip-hoppers with regard to the allegiances they display in colour and class. Furthermore, since rap music is associated

with opposition and ethnicity, I examine its relationship with the mainstream (locally and trans-locally) in relation to theories of domination and subordination. In the sixth chapter I employ ethnographic descriptions and references to support my analysis of the relationship between power and performance. In the conclusion, I appraise hip-hop and rap music performance in terms of the content in the preceding chapters, the metaphors, principal theories, and the hypothesis.

## Chapter 2

### Performance, metaphor, and agency

#### 1. Cape Town: The metaphoric domain

##### a. The place

Cape Town is located on the southern tip of Africa and is affectionately known as the Mother City. European colonisers called it the Cape of Storms because of the cold, blistering, and sometimes gale-force winds from the south-east. Later, when the city prospered as a commercial center under British rule in the nineteenth century, the Cape of Storms became known as the Cape of Good Hope. Today, due to the violence and crime on the Cape Flats, hip-hoppers use the phrase, "Cape of Storms". Cape Town is the commercial and administrative center of the Western Cape, one of the nine provinces in South Africa.

Metropolitan Cape Town is situated on a peninsula that is roughly divided into three areas: the northern suburbs, the southern suburbs, and the Cape Flats. The northern suburbs lie to the east of the city bowl and have a distinct rural feel. Before the removal of apartheid, these areas were inhabited mainly by white Afrikaans-speaking people. The southern suburbs are more cosmopolitan, and are situated along the slopes of Table Mountain and the Twelve Apostles. This part of the peninsula is inhabited mainly by foreigners and English-speaking people. Properties in these areas are expensive and until the late 1980s, they were reserved for white people only. With the demise of apartheid, more black and coloured people, especially those in parliament or the corporate world, have been settling here<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> See Bickford-Smith (1995) and Maylam (1995). Both provide reconstructed histories of the apartheid city. Maylam emphasises the importance of material forces in the shaping of urban segregation and apartheid while Bickford-Smith deals specifically with race and its influence on urban planning in colonial Cape Town. For more extensive reading see Smith, D. ed. 1992. "The Apartheid City and Beyond": Urbanisation and Social Change in South Africa. London. Routledge.

The Cape Flats is of particular relevance to this study as it is in this part of the peninsula that hip-hop has its base. Prior to, and with the advent of apartheid, thousands of coloured and black families were forcibly relocated east of the railway line that snakes along the foot of Table Mountain and the Twelve Apostles. Conditions in the Cape Flats are not merely the symptoms of post-apartheid South Africa. Rather, racial politics are fundamental to how township life is experienced and organised. A brief political history of the construction of places in South Africa provides some context for the continuing attachment to rap music.

Legislative procedures such as the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Separate Representation of Voters Act of 1951, the Separate Amenities Act of 1953, and race classification dealt black people an economic, political and social blow, from which they have as yet not recovered. The ultimate goal of these Acts was to establish residential racial purity by shifting groups from one place to another. Communities were uprooted and forced to move from choice suburbs close to main cities and their places of work, to what eventually became decrepit slums far from the city.

Black people were moved from the city to the township of Ndabeni on the Cape Flats in 1901, while most of the townships on the Cape Flats emerged in the 1960s as a dumping ground for coloured people who had been evicted from their homes in the southern suburbs, the city bowl, and District Six. Many coloured families refused to move to what people generally refer to as “The Flats” and emigrated instead to countries like Australia and Canada.

Another factor that contributed to the growth of the Cape Flats is that people who sought refuge from rural poverty settled here. These were people who lived in the smaller *dorpiets* (villages) outside Cape Town, or those who could not survive in the bantustans.<sup>8</sup> Although most of the Cape Flats consists of sub-economic slum areas and informal settlements, there do exist residential pockets occupied by a middle class.

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<sup>8</sup> The apartheid government entrenched the notion of separate cultures for black people to keep them subordinated and divided. They had to live in areas identified as “homelands”. These areas were recognised as “independent” countries by the apartheid government and as “bantustans” by the liberation front.

What does Cape Town represent to the masses living on the Cape Flats? Since the arrival of the Dutch colonisers in the seventeenth century a legacy of oppression and resistance has assisted in the marking of a fragmented and contested urban space. In Cape Town power is still exclusive, discriminatory and structurally connected with the perpetuation of oppressive and inequitable social relations. For instance, despite official rhetoric, local authorities continue to service communities on the basis of class. In trying to make sense of this urban space, then, it is possible to start with a conception of the city as a site of struggle and a source of structural power. This is an ongoing dynamic and for this reason I conceive of context as process.

While the sprawling slums on the Cape Flats may signify alienation and displacement, it is nevertheless a place where people establish and re-establish a sense of roots. Heidegger's anthropological approach to understanding the social processes of place construction is pertinent. He sees place as constructed in our memories and affections through repeated encounters and complex associations in which place experiences are time deepened and memorised (1975:156-158). Hip-hoppers such as GDP refer to the need to establish roots, a desire that is derived from how they experience relations with others, from how they perceive and construct their place. There is a symbolic attachment to place, a process through which they imagine some degree of stability:

*LW: You mentioned that your music gives you a sense of roots. People move around so much these days, from city to city, or continent to continent. Why is it still so important to have roots?*

*Sparrow: Anything that doesn't have roots will either perish and besides it perishing, it will blow away like dust. Roots are your foundation, where you come from and from there you can either grow or live. I can definitely relate to where I come from and that's why I can express myself in terms of whether you're referring to this, that or the other, I...can relate and I can express where I come from even if I should go to the UK. This isn't a country that I adopted, I was born here so my roots is here. I know where I'm at. (Interview: October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

*Raoul: Roots can also choke what has been nurtured...already. The thing is I'm glad hip-hop's choked the other things that were in my mindset. When I met Ice and Sparrow, I was busy with other things. If hip-*

*hop...if I did not start to participate in hip-hop at that time I would probably have been buried long time ago or in jail. Hip-hop's a good thing in the sense of...it helps some individuals get rid of their frustrations that they have. The thing is, if you don't have roots, it's like being a bottle in the ocean, drifting around. You hope sooner or later it will go somewhere. It keeps you centered because you're always thinking, okay, not in terms of hip-hop only...it gives you something there...like gravity. (Interview: October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

## **b. The people**

The relationship between ethnicity and hip-hop can be accounted for, in large, by where hip-hop members come from. In the USA, hip-hop first emerged as a social movement among black people and Latinos in the ghettos. Through sound and dance, coloured youths in Cape Town vigorously attacked the white minority government and aligned themselves with the oppressed majority of black people. Hip-hop is marked by the allegiances hip-hoppers have created. Although economic class is one of the platforms from which they move, colour consciousness ultimately directs the course that hip-hoppers pursue. To a large extent this can be attributed to the demographic history of the Western Cape and the racial policies of apartheid.

In Cape Town contact between European colonisers and their slaves, most of whom were from the Far East, and groups of people indigenous to the western Cape, such as the Khoi and San, led to the emergence of a group of people that the apartheid government labeled “coloured”. Since the earliest European occupation in the seventeenth century and up to the late 1980s, the majority of the people in Cape Town were either white or coloured.<sup>9</sup>

There were not enough black people to significantly alter the balance of racial representation in the city. The reason for this situation is that even before the advent of apartheid, colonial and municipal authorities restricted the movement of black people in and around Cape Town (Bickford-Smith 1995). In addition, apartheid legislation after 1948, such as Influx Control

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<sup>9</sup> Maylam observes that Cape Town was a pioneer in the implementation of influx control (1995:33). Before the advent of apartheid the Cape Town City Council controlled the influx of black people through a system of service contracts, yet discriminatory racial policies have been attributed solely to Afrikaner nationalism.

and the Pass laws of 1952, was designed to restrict black urbanisation and to secure an adequate supply of cheap black labour to the nascent white capitalist class. Black people were denied permanent residential status so as to limit the social and political problems that were perceived to accompany urbanisation. Since the late 1970s more and more black men and women started migrating to Cape Town, despite the risk of imprisonment and deportation. Indeed, Cape Town is becoming more “African”, as the upheaval in central Africa is propelling refugees toward the city.<sup>16</sup> Thus in a region where white and coloured people had constituted the majority for centuries, there is a shift to a more equitable representation of racial groups.

In the pages above I have represented Cape Town as a place that is ruptured, and probably richer for it. Hip-hop occupies a space in between these ruptures. Cape Town is a place with an incoherent identity where its inhabitants do not share a single sense of place. People and places have multiple identities. Accordingly, Cape Town can be regarded as a domain where differences and similarities are staged and negotiated. This is manifested in the large number of ways people connect the “here” with other parts of the country and the rest of the world. In the hip-hop scene these multiple positions and identities are both a source of richness and conflict.

## **2. The metaphor**

During slavery black people were violently removed from their home in Africa and transported by ship to the Americas. In the twentieth century, especially in the period after the second world war, black people emigrated from the British colonies to the UK and back to Africa. On this circular route they used the ship as the primary means of transport. The black diaspora was made prominent by the circulation of cultural expressions that spoke to their history of displacement, recovery, and commonality. Gilroy regards the circular motion of the ship as a metaphor for the circulation of cultural expressions on the transatlantic route

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<sup>16</sup> Under apartheid black people were forced to live in bantustans. To escape poverty many of these people, especially black men, migrated between the cities and the bantustans. Their time spent in the city was limited and once their contracts expired they had to move back to their homes, or face imprisonment and deportation.



(1993). In Cape Town, suburbs and townships are connected and separated by the train moving on its circular railway line. In this dissertation I have constructed the railway line that cuts through and circles the Cape Peninsula as the guiding metaphor. For Cape Town's hip-hoppers the train is the primary form of transportation:

*Raoni: POC does not travel train ever. We have to travel train everyday. POC has a car but in the video they say they travel by train and so on. (Interview: October 1997, Mitchell's Plain)*

The railway line gouges into the sand, creating boundaries that are as multifarious as the real and imagined boundaries within hip-hop. At this point it is useful to keep Thornton's "multiplicity of boundaries" that divide and give shape to South Africa in mind (1996:142), for on an immediate level it can be said that the railway line does the same for Cape Town. The railway line is synonymous with not only the simulation of boundaries, but also the shaping of the Cape Flats into different locations occupied by people of varying hues and classes. Hip-hoppers in one township use the train to bring them into contact with hip-hoppers in other townships. Once contact has been established, they return to their respective townships by way of the railway line. While the railway line may divide people, it serves an important mechanism for cementing relationships in the hip-hop community. Their spray-paintings on the train are not only a challenge to the owners of the train, but also a challenge to other hip-hoppers to equal or better a painting. Thus on the one hand the hip-hop community inhabits an imaginary space that transcends the borders inscribed by the railway line. On the other, the space that hip-hoppers inhabit is enclosed, and connected to other spaces, by the railway line.

At some stations or junctions on the Cape Flats there are multiple sets of tracks and several platforms that may cause confusion and frustration. The railway line represents the ongoing tensions that prevail within hip-hop. It divides and unites people, particularly those who are not in possession of private transport. Increasingly more of the tags hip-hoppers own are appearing on trains. Their turf is where the train moves; their identities are projected outside the borders of the townships, and, for a moment, those living outside the townships are confronted by the other. Their tags on trains declare ownership of public property, while paradoxically affirming the tenuousness of their identities.

The image of the circular railway line is a trope that marks the relationships among hip-hoppers, and, the nature of the relationship between hip-hoppers and their location. Brown observes that “where the west has made culture a matter of teleological linearity, of synthesis out of thesis and antithesis, African and African-American art–practices rely on circularity and flow as a structural principle” (1994:492). As the train moves between destinations, the feeling is one of near-perpetual motion, inscribed in circles across the Cape Flats.

In hip-hop, circular motion dominates both in style and symbolic display. For instance, hip-hoppers always employ circular movements in their dancing. These vary from minute gestures to broad movements. Circularity in movement suggests the space of the individual, and the shared or collective space of the crew. The circle inscribes the space of the individual, which connects with the circles of other crew members in an even larger circle, especially during performance. In much the same way that kinship among the Tiv in Nigeria is demonstrated through circular patterns, the circle flags the hip-hop crew as a post-colonial “family”. Keil describes how the Tiv conceptualise their social space as an ever-widening series of concentric circles (1979:14). Each circle represents a particular lineage. In hip-hop circularity connotes the uniqueness or sovereignty of the crew. It is from this unit that hip-hoppers begin to move.

Second, circularity suggests the ongoing tensions that exist among crews. There is neither a political pull to the left nor the right, only constant yet sublimated rivalry:

*Raouk: Family meaning not only your father, mother and all that. Family meaning your fellow b-boys that's what it's about. The people don't always realise that, they always saying "b-boy forever", but you will hear them saying "look here, don't go to that brother because he's full of kak(shit), don't do this don't do that because he's a dingese(so and so). Look at Marlon-them, we were working on a compilation and behind our backs they were calling us (garbled speech to suggest swearing) €~° and #S°, we went to them and challenged them and they were treating us like long lost brothers. They can talk behind our backs but we will tell them in their faces you're a (\*€. POC did not want to pay brother Ice, they gave him partial payment for work he had done. Then they told him they put the money in the bank, he checked and there was nothing there. So I confronted one of them and said "look here, you better...you don't know what you're fucking with. Grave Diggers is all about the family, you must give the man his money, you say you've paid the money.*

*Here's the fax number so fax us the receipt. Thank you"...Ice is the Art God I mean. No one gives him his due, he's one of the best graffiti artists in South Africa. They take advantage of him because he is a good natured brother. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

Hip-hop performance is the medium through which tensions among crews and between crews and society are enacted and resolutions negotiated. This is why crews occasionally will work together.

Third, the circle suggests the constant dialogue between what is contrived to be local and global. The local is often mobilised as a site of negotiation with the national and the global in unfolding narrative. On the local level hip-hoppers interpret conditions in the township according to the urgency with which the national government seeks to address problems in the townships. On the global scale, the relationship with the west is interpreted as one of domination by white hegemony, and the subordination of the developing world. Hip-hoppers are constantly aware of these power relations.

Fourth, as Shaheen suggests, circularity represents the spiritual dimension to our existence:

*Spirals have spiritual connotations...a lot of the things could be...I think...spinning looks effective as well. If you really want to know how does it fit into a bigger type of picture...they say things that more spirally have to do with some spiritual vibe. If it is then it's cool. (Interview: November 1997, Woodstock)*

The notion of birth–death–rebirth is fundamental to most religions. In the USA hip-hop is closely associated with the Nation of Islam, a religious organisation.

### **3. Performance and metaphor**

The way in which we behave has a great deal to do with where it is we come from; what we are influenced by, our expectations of life, our worldviews. These experiences add meaning to our daily toil and pleasures. More importantly, meaning is obtained from the way in which we employ metaphors as signposts on this journey. This is the situation for hip-hoppers. In their case, performance is the medium for the marking and display of meaning.

Hip-hoppers participate in the movement because they have a desire to change the way they feel about themselves and the world in which they live. Metaphors motivate them to bring about significant conversions in themselves and deal with the world they inhabit. In the dissertation the train and the circular track on which it moves are the metaphoric signposts. Through the use of these tropes the utterances and behaviour of hip-hoppers can be interpreted in such a way that the cause for their participation in the movement can be supported.

Hip-hop is mediated specifically through performance. I examine performance as behaviour that is both formally staged and an aspect of everyday life in which the hip-hopper strives to have some effect on an audience (Mukerji and Schudson 1986:50). Hip-hop performances allow young people to express ways of coping with an alienating society. In the hip-hop scene of Cape Town recruitment is rooted in communities who experience a high degree of poverty and crime, thus all performances can be regarded as socially driven and goal-oriented. Performance is a way of dealing with exclusion from political and economic power, as well as a struggle for the restoration of human dignity. For instance, in saying "*I am coloured/black/unemployed/oppressed*", hip-hoppers draw attention to their marginality and they are simultaneously motivated by their status. These forms of consciousness are metaphoric assertions that give them the space to move (Fernandez 1986:6).

#### **4. Power and metaphor**

In the process of mobilising and performing hip-hoppers show that power is potentially transformative (Storey 1993:92). At a workshop held in Pollsmoor prison for instance, hip-hoppers demonstrated to inmates the possibility of bringing about transformation in their lives. These workshops last for about one and half hour, admittedly not much. Nonetheless, exposure to hip-hop's empowering potential does stimulate and motivate inmates to work towards personal empowerment. Participation by inmates in the workshop revealed that as agents, they are potentially able to regulate social relations in the pursuit of collective goals. In this context, power is demonstrated as a set of discursive relations in which both inmates and hip-hoppers mediate social action. In the process hip-hoppers bring to light Foucault's notion of disciplinary power, the union of power and knowledge (Mc Houll and Grace 1993).

As agents, hip-hoppers have learnt that they can represent knowledge through action (Fabian 1990:6). Hence performance reflects empowerment as the capacity to transform. Empowerment is the recognition of an “emancipatory potential and an enablement” through which hip-hoppers obtain enlightenment about their situation (Cornell and Hartmann 1998:83).

In hip-hop performance facilitates empowerment as performance has to do with the processes of dialogue between enactors with the purpose of building the capacity within themselves and others for social action (poetics). It is their participation in the public space that reveals the strategies hip-hoppers employ and the positions they occupy in society and within the movement. From this awareness springs forth a sense of commitment that is translated into performance. Thus hip-hop performances are symbolic of physical as well as ideological power.

By developing skills for performance and collective social action, hip-hoppers are able to survive in conditions that appear to be hostile. Hip-hoppers have created an alternative public sphere that exists paradoxically as a part of, and in opposition to, the mainstream. Common to both tendencies is the need for them to hold onto what is theirs, to participate in mainstream activities but not to sell-out. Cape Town’s hip-hoppers are simultaneously engaged in the struggle between resistance to the mainstream and participation within it:

*LW: In November (1997) you will be participating in a concert sponsored by a cigarette company. Anti-smoking adverts tell us that companies are not able to sell their cigarettes in the developed world and are now targeting Africa and the developing world. Does appearing in a concert of this nature not compromise the message that you want to communicate to other youths?*

*Deon: We can tackle this from a number of angles. Me, number one, I don’t support smoking, I don’t condone it. Then if you look from a survival point of view, you need the money but then they might say you’re selling out. You’re doing this just for the money. But then there are not much people in our community that are supporting us, for giving us that financial backing that we need. If there were sufficient support from our community then it wouldn’t be necessary for us to do fuckin’ Benson and Hedges, Peter Stuyvesant those shit out there, but at the end of the day we have our families to feed so what do you do, and umm... we’re going*

*there to do a show...hopefully there will be twenty to thirty thousand people there, that will get to see hip-hop in person and as you know with all the things connected to hip-hop, we are basically introducing the art form to all those people and millions more that will be seeing it on television. Doing the show is more of an advantage than not doing it, if you want to promote the culture. If people can learn to support us, as white people do and black people do with kwaito music, it won't be necessary. (Interview : October 1997. Cape Town)*

In a society where there is neither social order nor a homogeneous culture, hip-hop performance is emphasised as discursive practice (Fabian 1990:17). Power is generated and maintained through the assertion of differences. Informants iterate the importance of being positive, thus hinting at the need for empowerment. Those who participate in hip-hop performances emerge empowered and euphoric. Since hip-hop is mediated through performance, an analysis of how metaphors in performance engender feelings of empowerment is crucial to developing an understanding of how these articulations offer “rich portrayals of locally embedded and globally connected performance practices” which hitherto have been neglected in ethnographies on popular music (Erlmann 1996:12).

## Chapter 3

### Rap and hip-hop in Cape Town

#### 1. Rap's musical origins

Rap owes its musical structure to two African American music forms of the 1970s, funk and disco.<sup>11</sup> Funk emerged in the 1960s; this style is derived from African rhythmic patterns fused with contemporary musical technology. No single instrument dominated. Each instrument acted as a drum that plays a brief, repeated pattern. These parts are reconstructed into a timbral and tonal conversation. Melody is less important yet it may emerge from the interplay of the rhythms. Once the song is established it shifts into another groove, key or speed. The rhythmic parts are also re-arranged. Initially dance music, recent funk music addresses experiences of the inner city, where the concern is about redemption before annihilation of the ghetto. In the USA funk's main proponents were George Clinton and James Brown.

In disco music prominence was given to the record producer and the dj. Disco music's contribution to rap was measured by its technological innovations more than anything else. It consists of a rhythmic section, an underlying bass drum, hi-hat cymbals and vocals. Keyes observes that as soon as the music industry, in its quest for commercial success, was able to manipulate the success of disco music, creativity gave way to formula, and the innovations that black musicians had introduced lost their meaning (1996:227). As disco music became more mainstream, (in the USA white culture is seen as mainstream) black disc jockeys moved from the arena of the disco to the streets of the ghetto. Using speakers they competed with each other to see who could produce the *phattest* bass sounds. Their sound became increasingly politicised as turntables and huge speakers became weapons, turning the ghetto into a site of black resistance. Rappers appropriated these features of funk and disco but unlike disco and funk, rap music emerged as much more than dance music. In the late 1970s it developed into a display of the cultural values and aesthetics of the marginalised black and

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<sup>11</sup> See Baker 1991, Brown 1994, Keyes 1996. They discuss the musical and extra-musical elements of funk and disco in greater detail than I am able to do here.

Latino communities in the South Bronx. Ghetto youths were mobilised through rap music which affirmed their colour and class position.

Financial cutbacks in New York City public schools is suggested as another reason for the emergence of rap music. Having little access to conventional musical instruments, youths made increasing use of their voices. Beat-boxing and the use of portable and inexpensive technology such as the noisy and powerful ghetto blaster emerged in this context. Other equipment used were the turntable, speakers and samplers. In hip-hop, mastery over technology connotes prestige.

Rap music consists of noise organised around the elements of orality and heavy bass beats. For melodic effect rappers depend heavily on the use of the sampler. In rap music, however, the emphasis is on creating powerful rhythms for the purpose of mobilising its audience. The rhythm of the rap is an integral part of the whole rhythmic structure. Hip-hoppers blend local sounds and local social concerns with a style that is globally recognised as peculiar to that movement. Sometimes, as is the case of rap music in Cape Town, these sounds are local; at other times, local sounds are blended with sounds from other parts of the world. Rap music in Cape Town thus reflects a collusion of diverse musical representations.

Hybridity is one of the key elements in rap music aesthetics (Keyes 1996, Walser 1995). My contention is that the hybridity in the rap music of Cape Town is really a double-hybridity, a hybrid of a hybrid. Rappers infuse their lyrics with a number of social languages; slang, English, Afrikaans, ebonics, and so on. These are blended with a music style in which samples from all kinds of sources are used. The originality lies in the manner in which these sounds and the lyrics are manipulated and blended:

*John: Hip-hop is mainly about originality...using other pieces of music and making it your own...you are using other people's language and making it your own to express your emotion and feeling. (Interview with GDP member. October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

Hybridity in musical style is a result of the cultural exchange between groups of people. Music of one community has always been influenced by music of another community; one musician



has always influenced another. Rap style reflects these dialogical experiences. In rap though, the dialogue is a deliberate attempt at usurping the voice of the other, and of “*making it your own*” (John). Rap style is about bringing the outside in. Rap’s doubled-voiced discourse is based on intertextual processes such that the rap song contains the inflected voice of the other (Schumacher 1995:265). The “other” can be imagined to be outside the borders of the crew, township, city and nation. In the popular music of Cape Town there is a history of borrowing and bricolage. For instance, Malay choirs and minstrels have always appropriated sounds from abroad. More often their appropriations are blended into a style that are parodies of the original songs. The aesthetic of double-hybridity is therefore shared among a number of popular music genres in Cape Town, including rap.

## 2. Rappin da beat in Cape Town

Emile produced and is distributing a booklet called “What is Hip-Hop?”. Included is a review of the history of hip-hop in Cape Town. With his permission I have selected and included parts of his outline in the following section:

I’m doing this hip-hop since 83  
That’s way before the POC ...  
Do you remember, huh, back in the days  
Damn it was fun, Saturdays we pack up the Base  
The place which we used to come  
(POC : “The Roof is on Fire” : Ghetto Code)

In Cape Town, films like “Beat Street”, “Wild Style” and “Breaking I and II” helped to disseminate information about the social and creative aspects of hip-hop. “Beat Street” and “Wild Style” feature spraycan artists as their main characters. These films introduced the movement to a wider audience as more youths were able to view hip-hop in action and in its social context. Elements of hip-hop, such as dancing and spraypainting, became visible on the streets of Cape Town in 1982:

*Sparrow: There were a lot of crews at that time...things were a lot more positive then. You had this vast participation from all who wanted to be a b-boy, a graffiti artist. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

*Ice: I think everybody went through their phases of different types of music and going to nightclubs...at the time we did not discover rap music. All of us did breakdancing first and only after that other aspects...came into existence, into our beings...art...graffiti art was like the last part of hip-hop basically...it was like a lifestyle to us. (Interview: October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

To a large extent the experiences of urban black youths particularly in the USA are similar to those experienced by black youths in apartheid South Africa. Youths in Cape Town identified with racial oppression as experienced by black people in the USA. This is one of the main reasons why they were attracted to hip-hop. Emile writes that the first time he came into contact with other hip-hoppers was in 1982 when a breakdancing competition was held at a club called Route 66, in Mitchell's Plain. The groups that participated were Ballistic Rockers, Hot Rods, Lightning Kid, Qtonians, and the crew that he was with at the time, Pop Glide Crew. As a result of competitions and workshops on streets and in parks, b-boys became more visible in the townships and city streets. With the growing popularity of b-boying carnivals and clubs increasingly staged competitions on a regular basis. Clubs used competitions as a marketing tool to ensure that large numbers of people attended.

Among the other crews that started at this time were Street Freaks, G-Force, Prolites, Hawaiian Breakers, Break Explosion, Cape Town City Breakers, City Breakers (a predominantly white crew), Supreme Rockers, Jam Rock Crew and Ultra-City Breakers: "The culture back then was new and there was a certain taste in the air about the experimentation with various moves and the regular battles that took place. It was always about competition back then and that caused b-boying to improve and kept crews ready for battle at any time. Most of these battles took place in parks, at Strandfontein Pavilion, on beaches, at Cape Town station, Club T-Zers and at Body Rock in Athlone. B-boys took to the streets of the city centre and because of its novelty and high entertainment value, people were tolerant of the b-boys jamming in the central business district. The tolerance ended as more and more so-called coloured b-boys joined the scene" (Emile YX:1997).

Groups of boys that were not white attracted the attention of those whose sole purpose was to prevent black people from congregating in public spaces. The apartheid state regarded any gathering in public as a threat to state security. During the early 1980s, acts of political resistance and protests were intensifying. As a last resort, the government declared a state of emergency in 1985. The state of emergency heralded a new stage in resistance politics and organisations had to re-orientate their political strategies. The government introduced new regulations aimed at crushing black resistance, a movement referred to by then President Botha as the *swart geraar* (black onslaught). Resistance intensified as townships became war zones where residents were engaged in running battles with the military. Curfews were enforced in black townships and groups of more than five were not allowed to congregate in public places. As a result, state and city council officials banned all public performances of dancing, especially in the city centre. Hip-hop was strongly associated with the anti-apartheid struggle; for hip-hoppers, the state of emergency meant subterfuge and consequently meetings and workshops had to be conducted in secret.

Spraycan art and b-boying became increasingly visible at the same time. The first spraycan artists in Cape Town were Gogga or Dev 18, Picasso, Da Vinci and Baby. The most productive ones were Gogga and Baby. Baby was a member of the Sky Bomb Masters. This crew belonged to the South African chapter of the Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation (UZHHN). King Jamo, Shai, TMD, Gee, Muff, Paz, Gorty, Ice and Falco One were also members of the UZHHN. Members of Sky Bomb Masters were harassed by the police and had their homes searched on suspicion that they were painting political slogans and spreading anti-government propaganda.

Repression by the apartheid government affected hip-hop because it became almost impossible for spraycan artists to go out and paint their pieces. Members of the movement had to go “underground” while other forms of resistance in the community continued and intensified. Emile observes that “those who were the founders of the culture in the Western Cape, were then faced with the realities of living in South Africa and hip-hop had to take a backseat to the boycotts and resistance against the apartheid regime” (Emile YX:1997). The following excerpt frames part of Emile’s political experience:

*There was a concert in Greenmarket Square. POC performed and we were also there and they (police) switched the power off because it was against conscription. There was also a show on the parade...they also switched off the power in the middle of one of our songs. We started off by saying, "this is where they sold our grandparents and now we sit here and we're celebrating and we're laughing in their faces because we're going to take over this country". After that we did a couple of songs and then the power was cut. (Interview : November 1997. Fish Hoek)*

As the paranoia of the apartheid state increased, harassment took on other forms. Anything and everyone was seen as a potential threat to the already fragile state. Not even young children escaped the wrath of the security forces. Emile recalls another incident:

*And then when we were breaking also...about 1984 or 5, during the school boycotts. We would go to the school rallies and the onens (guys) in my class were also breaking...and we would dance before the speaker came. So one day we're walking home from somewhere and these cops stop us, and this one says, "you know you can't be in a crowd of more than five, it's illegal", so we told him that we're coming from a jorl (dance). So they wanted us to dance for them and this we did...like we also used to break in town and they stopped that also because it was illegal because of the crowd. (Interview: November 1997. Fish Hoek)*

In the mid-1980s, townships became increasingly more militarised as all community based structures associated with the government became targets for sabotage. A strong military presence and police brutality awakened most people to the devastating effects of apartheid and militarisation; this consciousness motivated young children to join the resistance campaign.

Hip-hop enabled youths to show resistance in a way that was powerful but non-violent. Emile recalls how, when schools would gather for mass rallies his crew and other b-boys from different crews would keep the people entertained by b-boying, and competing with each other: "We were often ridiculed for doing b-boying when our political participation should be the priority. I remember defending the culture at many Student Representative Council meetings when people would attack it as distracting from the mission at hand. We always countered by saying that it was a physical vent for all the frustration that was built up by trying

to fight military equipment with stones. The mere fact that we were present at most of these events was proof of our dedication to the cause” (Emile YX:1997).

Today, some members of hip-hop feel betrayed by the very people whom they had supported in the struggle. While hip-hop is still rooted in the township, many of the ex-comrades have now moved on and reside in predominantly ex-white suburbs, leaving no role models for the youth in their old neighbourhoods, a crucial concern for hip-hoppers. They are, writes Emile, “spending all their time discussing philosophies with their white comrades in yuppie pubs and hangouts in which they are the only people of colour. When I think back to those days I find it ironic that so many people shouted ‘Free Mandela’ but never ever thought that they would see him freed, let alone become president of South Africa” (Emile YX:1997).

In the USA, rap music had become increasingly popular in the black and Latino ghettos. Rap had caught the attention of music entrepreneurs Sylvia and Joe Robinson of Sugarhill Records. There was a shift in the control and direction of the movement. Under their influence rap music soon became a billion-dollar industry. By the 1980s it had become a major profit-making business as black and Latino entrepreneurs handed control over to the white owned multi-national music industry.

Meanwhile, South African hip-hop received attention of another sort. Those who were involved with the movement had to contend with harassment from the police and ridicule from comrades fighting the apartheid regime. It was a period when the local media portrayed hip-hop as a phase. Members were ignored when they appeared in public. In the late 1980s however, hip-hop surfaced once again in the form of emceeing.<sup>12</sup> By this time the apartheid state was crumbling and with the state being unable to stem the tide of resistance, people generally became more vocal and demonstrative. Clubs were promoting rap competitions and

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<sup>12</sup> Rap music started as emceeing(mc'ing). “Mc” is an abbreviation for master of ceremonies, and is a form of verbal accompaniment spoken with a rhythmic beat. Emcee’s can battle with each other, an event in which they exchange rhyming couplets or phrases in a percussive, witty fashion. In one of the concerts I attended Eavaron’s conversation on the cellular phone became part of the rap. Emcee’s rap in freestyle too. Freestyle is about the exchange of rhymes without musical accompaniment.

emcee's were keen to participate. With the imminent demise of apartheid, youths were rhyming about whatever topic they desired, for a time solo emceeing flourished. Soloists eventually formed crews as the potential for making a living off emceeing became more viable.

Among the first emcees were Marley, Dean, Emile and Worro, who formed the Chill Convention. The crew later changed its name while working with a producer by the name of Mike Hartingh, and called themselves Black Noise. At the same time a new emcee called DSA joined DJ Ready D (also known as Deon), Ramone and Jazmo to form Prophets of Da City. Other groups that were around at that time were Sisters in Command, AK 47, Cool Out Crew, TMD, MC Revolt, Sell Out Syndicate, Cool Posse and others who regularly changed their names.

Along with emceeing another aspect of rap music, dj'ing, gained more popularity.<sup>13</sup> Dj'ing is one of the pillars of hip-hop and is an essential skill for the performances of rap. In South Africa music equipment is expensive. Dj'ing therefore involved a small group of individuals only. The first djs on the local scene were Rozanno X, Ready D, and Baby, an established spraycan artist. Presently Rozanno X and Ready D are prominent dj's in Cape Town. Others that followed were dj's like Shamiel X, Enver, Nasty, Arthur, and Darrin of Two Dope Flavas.

In June 1990, the first major hip-hop concert took place at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town where the above-mentioned crews were finally allowed to display their talent within the mainstream. This event followed the heightened visibility of the movement both in South Africa and in other parts of the world. At the show Prophets of Da City launched their careers with the release of the first rap album in South Africa. The album was called "Our World" and sold well. Following the success of this event the music industry recognised the potential in rap and became more involved. Groups such as Taps, and Intribe, a crew based in Johannesburg, released an album. Black Noise released an album and it became the second group in Cape Town to sign a record deal with a major local record label, "One World

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<sup>13</sup> The dj of old is now referred to as "turntablist". Turntabling has become an independent source for scholarly research.

Records”, owned by Tusk, a South African company. These groups, however, were not marketed properly and the rappers felt betrayed.

Local rap groups desired more freedom in the way that they wanted to express themselves because recording companies in South Africa, who had supported the machinations of the apartheid government in the past, became increasingly more prescriptive. Emile sees this need emerging as a direct consequence of being exposed to the strategies of rap groups like Public Enemy and other hard-core rappers in the USA. Rather than compromising, many of the crews in Cape Town terminated their recording contracts and funded their own releases. The additional pressures caused many groups to flounder. According to Emile, striking out independently showed “who was down with the culture one hundred per cent and who was into it only for the so-called fame and fortune” (Emile YX:1997).

Musicians recorded and distributed albums at their own expense. They did not have much recourse to legal protection, or the finance for promotion. They depended heavily on word of mouth, community radio stations such as Bush Radio, and the commercial station Radio Good Hope (RGH), to promote their albums. RGH broadcast mainly rap music from the USA, despite its claim to be “the station for Cape Town’s hip-hop nation”. During apartheid the music industry and commercial radio stations vigorously sought to marginalise the musical expressions of black people; especially the expressions of musicians who challenged apartheid. Until 1994 English medium commercial radio stations have largely excluded South African popular music from their playlists. The situation is slowly being transformed ever since the Independent Broadcast Authority stipulated the condition that more local content be included in their playlists.

In post-apartheid South Africa the relationship between rap and the music industry appears to be undergoing transformation. There are a number of independent record companies, some of which have been taken over by larger multinationals, such as Polygram, while others continue to break even on their own. The latest releases of POC, Black Noise, and BVK, have all been produced by companies such as Polygram and Making Music Publications<sup>14</sup>, and are

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<sup>14</sup> An independent producer in Cape Town.

no longer distributed by the artists themselves. One of the country's oldest distributors, Musica, is selling Cape Town's rap music in a section of its shop dedicated to South African music. On RGH as well, more local rap music is being aired. Rap sensation of the late 1990s, BVK, is receiving substantial airtime. A member of BVK appeared on television in a program dedicated to music sung in Afrikaans. In December 1998, RGH chose Black Noise's latest release as album of the week. Songs from the album were played every night for a week, even though it was after peak listening time.

The commitment that rappers displayed in the political arena has not abated. Their relationship with the apartheid government was one of resistance. In the period after the unbanning of liberation movements they have not compromised. They are critical of the new state. When hip-hoppers have a problem with government policy they raise their voices, despite their continued participation in government projects. In 1990 for instance, they performed on the parade, a shopping and parking square in central Cape Town, to celebrate the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. The Department of Education in the Western Cape procures Black Noise's services regularly. Both POC and Black Noise took part in the government's drive for potential voters to participate in the elections of 1994 and 1999. In 1999 POC and BVK performed at the Oppikoppi music festival that is held in the Northwest Province annually. Deon participated in an international disc jockey competition. These developments signal the beginning of a new relationship with the mainstream. Rappers realise that they have to make a living, and this can be obtained by edging closer to mainstream structures. Yet despite closer contact with the mainstream, the struggle to keep hip-hop "real", or authentic, adds pressure to the relationship with the mainstream.<sup>15</sup>

There is another positive development in hip-hop. At the end of 1997 and 1998, Cape Town rappers organised hip-hop festivals. The festival of 1999 was somewhat erratic due to the

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<sup>15</sup> I am aware of the position that "authenticity" not be regarded as a musical quality. I use the term in the context proposed by Gilroy. He regards the term "authenticity" as an evaluation of music that expresses the "absolute essence of the group that produced it" (1991:114). Hip-hoppers regard authenticity as a quality that reflects everything that transpires in their community, including its hybridity. See my quotation from the Black Noise song, *Awhoonha*, in the conclusion to the dissertation.



restrictions of *Ramadaan*. It was hoped that these festivals will become a permanent arrangement. Visitors from overseas attended and participated in proceedings. Workshops and competitions were held on the Cape Flats and in surrounding rural towns such as Paarl and Stellenbosch. The festivals culminated in a major event where rappers and b-boys from all over the Peninsula and surrounding towns congregated to compete in the final battle. In 1998 the festival was taken to the black townships of Langa and Gugulethu for the first time. Clearly there is an interest in these townships that has yet to be developed.

In these townships I saw black women rappers on the stage and heard other rappers sing in Xhosa. Hip-hop was first associated with coloured youths and the politics of resistance, then coloured youths and political transformation. Now, in post-apartheid South Africa, hip-hop is at last becoming more visible in the black townships. It might still hold the answer to uniting the fragmented youth population of the Cape Flats.

## Chapter 4

### Heyta daar, Cape Crusaders

In this chapter hip-hoppers relate their biographies, crew histories and their experiences of hip-hop. As voices from behind the railway line their individual tales and experiences express ownership of a movement that helps them to define their "local". Hip-hop in Cape Town constitutes a moment in the circular movement of black cultural expressions around the Atlantic ocean, and further, as a symbol of cultural globalisation. Communication with hip-hop communities in other parts of the world is assisted by membership to hip-hop structures that are organised globally. I include a review of the institutional features of hip-hop.

#### Section A

##### Cape of storms: Adaptation and rapping for survival

Struggle, resistance and negotiation were, and still are, keywords in the history of South Africa. For the past three hundred and fifty years these forms of interaction have connoted the relations between a subordinate and a dominant culture that have always been intensely active and oppositional. The results of these interactions were decided by the oppressed who brought to the forum where the struggle ensued, a repertoire of strategies and responses, ways of coping as well as resisting (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, Roberts [1975]1997:103). Each strategy in the repertoire mobilised certain material and social elements that were shaped into the different ways people lived and resisted. Deprived of any political and economic power, oppressed people often chose to wage their resistance through cultural expressions. These expressions were contained within a space from which the oppressor was excluded. Since its inception hip-hop has been flourishing in a space exclusive to a sector of the oppressed community. Rappers reside in spaces on the periphery and they use hip-hop as a strategy against various forms of oppression.

Rappers have adapted to their environment by rearranging expressive elements and selecting structural procedures in order to articulate their position, define performance situations, and

make statements about their social reality (Coplan 1985:233). These kinds of performances have become new ways for those youths involved to preserve some self-respect in the face of constant humiliation. Thus hip-hop performance offers an alternative sphere of influence where an inflexible and harsh social reality is reconstituted.

Adaptation is not merely a process of adjustment to pressures imposed from the outside; it is also an attempt to create frameworks within which to resolve the confusion of township life. People on the Cape Flats who had been forcibly removed from their homes during apartheid were compelled to adapt their culture, or to adopt new forms of cultural expressions. Rappers, however, do not merely adapt to an environment. As agents they play a role in the production and use of the urban context through musical and social practices. The environment determines their levels of participation, the kind of musical expressions they adopt, and how they reinvent these expressions to serve personal or ideological needs. These issues are crucial to understanding the reasons for the emergence of hip-hop in Cape Town. Globally, hip-hop is experienced as an urban movement; cities therefore provide the arena for the movement of hip-hop from one location to another. In hip-hop there are patterns and ongoing processes that constitute a distinctly urban culture. This culture is fuelled by the power of difference.

In order to further understand rap music as symbolic of social process, informants reveal their experience of life in a township on the Cape Flats. In this section our guides are Angelo and Gavin:

*Angelo: My name is Angelo and I'm nineteen years old. Well, I've been breaking for five years now. I live in Mitchell's Plain and it is very rough in Mitchell's Plain. There are a lot of gang fights but I'm trying to live positively. Not to become a gangster or something like that because gangsters is fashionable out where we stay. Everybody wants to be a gangster, Yakees and Americans and so on. The reason I joined Black Noise, okay, they asked me to join. I breakdanced and I like dancing a lot and dj'ing and hip-hop keeps you away from the bad things. Had it not been for hip-hop I may have been a gangster. The area I live in, all the people do is suip (drink alcohol excessively) and smoke dugga (marijuana). Every day, every weekend. Now we're trying to be a positive role model to them. I try to show them that you can enjoy your life without all that. I first came into*

*contact with hip-hop at a function at NICRO<sup>16</sup> where I saw the people dancing and I thought that this is kwaai (great). Since that day I've been breakdancing. After that I performed at Westridge Civic where Black Noise had a concert. So they asked whether we can't perform there so we thought we can show our skills, that is why we practice. After that places like Worcester. I travelled with them overseas and I've learnt a lot from them. (Interview : December 1997. Translated from Afrikaans.: Atlantis)*

*Garin: I joined because I've seen a lot of my friends get killed and through hip-hop it's opened up my whole mind frame. Not to be the same, it's not that I don't want to talk to them. They're still my friends. I grew up with them. It's just, rather look up to me as a role model than to look up to a gangster. I've got almost fifty kids living in my road, and they see these gun fights. One morning a friend of mine was shooting another friend in front of these kids and he was still shooting into the kid. And the next day I told this friend that got away, look, we saw what happened. It's detrimental not just to you but to the people living around you as well. And today I can proudly say, he's part of the hip-hop family...because he realised what he's doing is wrong and most of his gang friends are changing as well. They are going out into the community. In the new South Africa I just hope that they're not going to look at hip-hop as being a phase, because if hip-hop was a phase I would not have been here now, I would probably have been a gangster. (Interview : November 1997: Delft)*

District Six, an area on the border of the city bowl in Cape Town, is probably the most vivid example and symbol of a displaced community. Freed slaves had started living here as early as 1834 and by the end of the century people of all hues, religions and classes, had settled in the area. There was an intense cultural exchange as many of the people from different backgrounds not only lived in close proximity to each other, but also shared in other facets of life. In the grand scheme of things, the fact that one was Muslim or Christian was of little consequence, as the emphasis was on sharing, regardless of background. Cultural exchange took place in a cinema such as "The Star" as well. The cinema served as a meeting point where musical shows and competitions were staged; and, as a window to musical trends overseas.

POC's song, "I Remember District 6" poignantly evokes the joy of living in District Six:

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<sup>16</sup> Nicro is an acronym for the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Integration of Offenders. It is a non-governmental organisation.

I remember the days in District Six  
The laughter of adults and little kids  
Hanover street and the markets with fish  
Where the music was always the heartbeat  
I remember the days of District Six  
The sound of the snoekhorn and the ouens used to  
Break with a lekker song  
(Ghetto Code)

For people who live in the townships the most important cultural legacy of this period that continues to this day, are the Malay choirs, and the annual minstrel carnival that takes place on the streets of Cape Town on the first and second days of the new year. During slavery the first day of the new year was usually a holiday for slaves. Minstrels are known as coons or *klopse*. Minstrelsy started late in the nineteenth century after a group of black minstrels from the USA had visited Cape Town.<sup>17</sup>

The annual New Year's Day carnival is a way of continuing part of the experiences of District Six and at the same time rivalries of old can be battled out in competition. During the carnival displaced people originally from District Six, who are now settled on the Cape Flats, convene in the city centre for a battle of another kind, one based on performance. Trains, buses and taxis are usually filled with colourful troupes of minstrels. In competitions the criteria for best performances include dress and song. Traditional Cape songs, such as "*Daar kommie Alibama*", a song about the arrival of a ship named "Alabama", as well as parodies of old and contemporary popular songs are sung. The songs are often accompanied by banjo's, tambourines, drums, cello's and guitars. Another example of musical continuity are the Malay

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<sup>17</sup> In Cape Town minstrel clubs were formed after a visit by the Mc Adoo's American Jubilee Singers, a black troupe from the USA. They visited Cape Town in 1887. Erlmann observes that the parallels between American black people and South African black people were based on historical contact over a period of time, and upon similar experiences of racial discrimination and oppression (1991:17). After 1990 more white people are participating in the annual carnival. See Coplan (1985) for further details.

choirs that still thrive in the Bo-Kaap area and other townships on the Cape Flats.<sup>18</sup> Their songs, such as the emotive wedding song, *Rosa*, display influences particularly from the east, though sung in Afrikaans. For coloured people in Cape Town there is a musical and cultural dynamic so deeply embedded that after all these years displacement cannot diminish its potency.

In a situation where one is forced to move from one place to another, a musical identity is one of the few things that provides a sense of roots and continuity. From an area such as District Six, people were relocated and crammed into slums such as Mannenberg, Bonteheuwel, Mitchell's Plain, Hanover Park, and Gugulethu, in the 1960s. An important development is that those who had gone to live on the Cape Flats developed another life forming new communities with its own character. With migration they were able to transport at least part of their cultural persona. A succinct reading of such a situation is offered by Mc Clary who posits that in music the "structures, narratives, semiotic codes, among others, may be developed, negotiated, resisted, transmitted, or transformed within a completely new social arena"(1994:102).

As a cultural movement organised in communities where black people live, rappers and the hip-hop movement represent another dimension to the music scene of Cape Town. During the apartheid era minstrels were regarded as government collaborators who conformed with the racial politics of the state. Rap musicians on the other hand, appeal to our conscience and our consciousness as people who are subjected to numerous injustices. Through their music, a rough sketch of a society undergoing stressful pressures is provided, and for this reason, their presence can be considered to be disturbing. It is impossible to separate the history of rap musicians in Cape Town from that of repression and resistance.

In their expressions the older generation of musicians in Cape Town and the new generation of musicians symbolise the transition from the old to the new. The social needs of people in

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<sup>18</sup> The Bo-Kaap is on the border of the city bowl and is the area where freed slaves, especially those of Malay descent, resided. Today it is an upmarket area and fairly integrated. Many Malay descendents continue to live there.

the townships and the needs of the marginalised, are channelled through an important expressive medium, music. For young people rap music is the antidote to the chaos and confusion of the townships. The music becomes significant because it helps them to believe in the harmony of the world. In their music, dancing and painting, they experience renewal and affirmation. Hip-hop and rap music are no longer merely about expression. Rather, as more and more township youths participate, hip-hop manifests increasingly as a coping strategy.

## Section B

### 1. The brasse (brothers)

One of the important ways people all over the world are alike is the way in which they situate and organise themselves socially. Hip-hop members are organised as crews or posses. Such a form of organisation can be regarded as a social unit with clearly defined codes of behaviour. To generate and maintain the spirit of hip-hop, and to relate effectively with each other, crew members behave according to specific codes of conduct, and participate in clearly defined groups.

Within the encircled space of the crew, innate feelings of companionship, obligation and reciprocity are encouraged. The structure of the crew, for example, reflects a need to meet particular characteristics required for participation in the movement. As a result, the crew has a limited and specialised social organisation. In hip-hop there is a new form of kinship that precipitates a different kind of family unit. The crew must be seen as a local source of identity and as an alternative group support system. In the following excerpt a hip-hopper explains why the crew is organised the way it is:

*Phat: The whole thing is this man, what I've come to realise is that everybody can't be a rapper, but then again nobody's perfect, you see. And as a lot of people can remember way back, with the bushmen and the Khoi and all that. There was different things man, the drums of Africa...what was like a telephone call and then the cave painters...which was very good and that was their form of expression...and then you have all the different cultures in one, you see, and here we have four beads working as one...without condemning each other's culture because when we move we move as one...we don't move individually man. That's why, in our*

*group, there's always breakers with us, graffiti artists, the dj and then you get the mc's...rap is not a selfish art, it's part of an art. (Interview : October 1997. Cape Town)*

#### **a. Prophets of Da City (POC)**

In the following transcriptions two members of POC reveal aspects of their lives and a history of the crew. The two members are Deon (also known as Akil to hip hoppers or as Ready D, a professional dj), and Shaheen:

*LW: Why did you choose to name the crew "Prophets of Da City"?*

*Deon: Number one, we grew up in gang-infested areas, the area with a high degree of poverty going on...so the reason why we choose Prophets of Da City is to tell people man...it's easy to predict what's going to happen...if we get into this whole drug and gang bullshit that is going on. So that's the one angle...or the one interpretation of the name...And then the other one is basically being witness and paying respect to all the great people and prophets...from Jesus to Moses, all the way to the prophet Mohammed. It's very social, very political and very spiritual. We might get up and give you a message straight in your face, or we might speak to your subconscious. If you listen to our song like "Wild Style", the lyrical format of that song...is a very technical style of rhyming, and a lot of humour...but if you listen between the lines, there is a lot of black consciousness messages coming through it. You know, big big time...and that is actually one of our most serious songs we ever did...but certain people won't pick up on that...so we're just using different methods to get the people...and at the end of the day, we're constantly experimenting because we see ourselves as scientists...concocting different sounds. At the end of the day our message is not just for the simple-minded, or the intellectual but for everybody.*

*LW: What is your role in the crew?*

*Deon: Man...we basically share comments between myself and Shaheen, whenever the whole group is sitting together then everybody will contribute to the conversation or the question or whatever, there's no throwing around of power because at the end of the day we all carry an equal load. Most of the time I'll be doing the organising or the talking. We're six members in POC. We are together as a crew now for nine years (1997). Three members have been here from the start.*



LW: Do you have something like a mission statement or credo?

Deon: The basic principle is just to be real to yourself, trying to respect yourself and the culture. That is the basic principle we operate on. It's a hip-hop thing, we think of hip-hop before we do anything else. Because we don't see ourselves as doing hip-hop, we see ourselves as hip-hop because we live this on a day to day basis. (Interview : October 1997, Cape Town)

Shahcen is the son of Issie Ariefdien, a member of the band Pacific Express. This funk group was popular on the Cape Flats during the 1970s:

Shabeen: When I was in high school I took up piano for a while. I think I was too impatient for it, I was way too impatient. You need a lot of patience...I didn't want to go through the reading process and there's a lot of theory involved and I wanted to play man. So that wasn't really enough to carry a person. My father's a musician and he taught me the mentality that something that is pop is not necessarily good because there used to be like all types of records lying around from Santana to Chick Corea...and I used to listen to that as well. You wouldn't hear it on radio. Growing up we were exposed to all types of stuff, from Kool And The Gang to Al Jarreau but mostly to what is known as black music. So it's kind of strange because not a lot of kids in the townships listen to Jimi Hendrix...so I think we're at a stage where we're trying to create our own style and our own identity. A lot of us are trying by first, to incorporate the language that we're speaking and we call it ghetto code, the type of code you speak where people don't understand you. But we did get caught in Holland and Belgium when we said that "ja, hulle het ryk geraak van ons" (the people here enriched themselves at our expense) and then the people understood because they agreed with us.

LW: What does being a member of POC mean to you?

Shah: Being effective I'd say. I think POC contributed somehow in exposing hip-hop to a large part of the country who didn't know that hip-hop existed... 'cause we performed in places where there was no electricity and dust roads and you had to use four or five extension cables to get electricity, and we performed in places where people didn't know that you can use a turntable as an instrument and there was music where there wasn't actually instruments, and the type of dancing, that was the one thing.

LW: What are your most important experiences?

*Shah: I think the kid that was dying. We were approached by...what's their name...(Reach For A Dream)" people because it was this kid's wish to meet with us. We did a performance in his room and all the pipes into his body, yo...definitely for me that was the event that stands out among the rest 'cause imagine laying on your death bed. There's all types of things the kids wish for...for somebody to request for us to be there is a hell of a thing. I'm sure there's things like the president's inauguration thingie and the whatever's man...but that's basically just personal gedagte (idea). (Interview : October 1997. Woodstock)*

## **b. Black Noise**

Emile is one of the original members of Black Noise. He is the spokesperson for the crew and represents the crew in negotiations with clients. He was a teacher for three years and gave it up to pursue a career in hip-hop:

*LW: Why is the crew named Black Noise?*

*Emile: The name has nothing to do with the colour of people. This guy used to live here in Fish Hoek, a white guy, Michael. He used to produce the music...he and Patti. They were sitting and discussing names for the crew, and the back of the keyboard there were different sounds like white noise...a sound for waves and other colours but there was no black noise...there was not such a sound. The crew then thought that maybe that is what we should call ourselves, Black Noise. And afterwards, the concept of being so called coloured, being a mixture of colours...formulates the colour black. For me hip-hop is like a mixture of everything, so it was like ideal and I went around promoting this name everywhere ...newspapers and so on. The guy that started the crew broke away and they went on their own...the rest of us that were left carried on. Like when we perform and people hear the word black. We were in Phillipi and someone went...hey, but this is then coloured boys. (Interview : November 1997)*

I shared with Emile my interpretation of the crew's name. When I first heard the name a few years ago I thought that it had to do with the colour of the members of the crew. My interpretation resonates with the crew's identification with black consciousness. In their music and associated activities the notion of "blackness" is inverted so that black is no longer evil

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<sup>1</sup> "Reach for a Dream" is an organisation that helps terminally ill children.

but something positive. Choosing a name such as “Black Noise” is an ironic gesture and a clever pun:

*LW: What attracted you to hip-hop initially?*

*Emile: I was dancing Michael Jackson style...and then there was this music video out called 'Hanging Out', and this guy was doing what is called 'kicking' and I practiced some of that. A couple of months later...a friend of mine...we were all roller skating together...like a club...this friend's cousin came from Canada and she invited me to come and meet him...and I thought, oh, not Canada...so I walk into the lounge and I look into part of the lounge that's like a stage and this ou's (guy) spinning on his back and I couldn't believe it...and I asked him to show me how. I got there about five o' clock and up to about past one, I was asking him to show me more and more and more. By the time I left there...and at the same time videos...with breaking and beating...I recorded and learned from there.*

*LW: Why were you more interested in the dancing?*

*Emile: The dancing was totally different...and when I saw Beat Street...there was a realisation that it was more than just the dancing. I think also I was looking for something to identify with just like any kid on the Cape Flats. Something like...I used to play baseball and soccer but that's like just sports and there's nothing cultural about it. I would go out and just watch but not perform...and then I would go home and practice there...maybe go to a club and perform in a circle but never on a stage...and then I met up with guys at school, one of them saw me dancing on a street corner with this guys...we used to roller-skate and break and when the people came home from work in the evening they would stop and watch. So people became aware and they would stay and watch. Then one guy from my class came and said that he didn't know I could dance because I was always quiet in class...and then three or four came to join the breaking...and we formed the crew sommer (right) there in the class. By that time we still hadn't done a show and it was just like informal. Down the road where I live there's a hall, a community youth group used to get together there...and one evening the youth group organised us something. So we did a performance of breaking and they...it was our first time on the stage and it was like...yo...nerves, eke sê (I say). One thing about the dancing was that it was comfortable, I had to get up on the stage and say we're going to do this or that...but teaching is almost the same thing. If I hadn't to do teaching, I wouldn't have been able to do this. Standing in front of the people...one on one is okay.*

LW: *What aspect of the movement do you enjoy most?*

Emile: *Maybe b-boying and spraycan art. Mc'ing is okay but when I write I write more poetry style because for me it's more important for the people to hear what I'm saying. It's almost like the graffiti art, nobody can see what it's saying. I learnt more from hip-hop than I learnt in my entire schooling career.*

LW: *Name one of the memorable experiences you've had.*

Emile: *When I was in the States in 1994 I went to a meeting and met this university student, we had a long discussion and it was like things he never knew about. He told me that he's been looking for answers all his life and in just one afternoon our conversation opened up his eyes to so many things. He was crying in the end. He realised there is nothing wrong in being black, that he can use his heritage and past to feel secure in society. I don't think they'll allow me back in the States. We had this meeting outside this venue and there was this cop car with a cop inside, taking photographs of us. It's weird.*

LW: *Is what you do important for youths only?*

Emile: *Parents are important, like telling them what's going on and to understand how I'm thinking. Parents also need to know because I'm working with their kids. I would have these discussions with my mom...I'll go away and come back to find her having the same discussions with her friends. (Interview : November 1997. Fish Flock)*

### **c. Grave Diggers Productions (GDP)**

This crew consists of a group of students, workers, and unemployed young men. They articulate an ideological position that is in opposition to that of other crews. Their credo or mission is: the system keeps telling us what to do, we say fuck the system, we create our own.

The interviews took place in Mitchell's Plain:

LW: *What is your role in the group?*

*Raoul: We all form part of GDP, that is, Grave Diggers Production and we started in 1992. Basically we're a community-based group. We encompass music, graffiti...but we're not like other groups who claim to be doing things. We're doing things and sometimes we don't...and we don't get recognition for it...like Ice has done a lot of things that he wasn't getting recognition for...besides the other members of Grave Diggers also. Grave Diggers released a compilation in 1995...which did get some airplay...but...because there is these bitches that are controlling rap music in Cape Town. If you are not kissing their arses, you are not getting anywhere...basically, Grave Diggers represent the outsiders.*

*LW: Is that as in outsiders to rap music?*

*Raoul: No, no...not to the music itself...the thing is. Other people's always telling you...look here...we're going to do this CD now and once we're finished with the CD we can do a lot of things for you guys...when we do the stuff, we wait two three years. Nothing...whereas we told people straight away...kyk hier(look here)...stiek uit(show up)...we are doing a compilation. If you want to contribute some money to the whole thing, fine, if not, fine. You can still do your stuff, great. We do not wait around for something to happen...hip-hop is not about conformity, I like to say hip-hop is like jazz, you try to define it, but you can never...because it is always evolving. (Interview : October 1997)*

*LW: What kinds of things influence you when you write?*

*Sparrow: Inspiration, very important. Basically it's what life means to you. What is important to me, I write about. What I believe would have a positive contribution or could be an eye-opener to the next party. (Interview : October 1997)*

#### **d. Phat (BVK)**

Phat is a member of a crew named *Brasse Vannie Kaap* (BVK), they are based in Bonteheuwel. They released their first album in April 1998. This is how Phat describes his involvement:

*Phat: Okay...I was basically about...in standard six (Grade 8). And lost as usual seeing that the ghetto is like a lost city in many ways...and I was sitting and a friend told me that his brother has this Run DMC album and then he brought this album...and I said I don't know them...and immediately, bang, on target, I*

*thought...but then I wasn't into rapping. I was just appreciating and appreciating...you know I was just like, fan...but then, after a few years I didn't want to sit around...let's go...it was something natural...that was the culture for me...and I could relate to it. It wasn't like the whole concept of I want to be punk rocker...at least I found something that I wanted...and I realised then...yo, it's explosive...so that's how I got into the culture. (Interview : November 1997. Cape Town)*

## Section C

### **If I want to motherfuck I can motherfuck.**

Rap music articulates the possibility of reclaiming hope and dignity in a world of diminishing opportunities. For black youths in Cape Town, hip-hop is a way to navigate their way through, and respond to, their lived context. To achieve this state of mobility, the hip-hopper has to acquaint himself with all aspects of the movement, with a view to strengthening himself and the crew.

Informants emphasise the importance of being positive, and of structuring their identities by way of the relationship they have with their environment. Hip-hop builds the individual's strength within the collective of the crew. Identities are split between the individual and the crew, yet this boundary is blurred when the crew is mobilised, or mobilising. Since hip-hoppers organise themselves into crews, their expressions allude to a form of group identification nurtured by the promise of an empowered self. For them, the production and consumption of rap music is an overt political process because it generates feelings and relationships that enable them to think positively, and behave competently in fields that are not musical.

Through educating the self, and by subscribing to a set of behaviours, a degree of equilibrium among members is reached. Maintaining selfhood becomes a means of working towards consensus within the movement. Members are supposed to adopt similar strategies and consequently, a position of strength can be obtained from where the battle against poverty and violence can be waged. The strength they acquire is used, moreover, as a means of

negotiating their way in and around the mainstream. In order for the self to be empowered he or she has to comply with certain criteria:

*LW: What makes a hip-hopper a hip- hopper?*

*Deon: Man...if you want to be a true hip-hop head or you want to get into the hip-hop culture for real. Number one, you must do some research into the culture so you can have a full understanding of what it is about 'cause there's a lot of people that think if you wear a baseball cap, you wear wide baggy clothes and you're got an attitude you're into hip-hop. It doesn't work like that, some people think if you can just get on the mic and you can say a couple of rhymes you're a hip-hopper and it doesn't work like that. You've got to have a full respect for the whole culture and there are basically five very important points or aspects to the culture. Number one, the dj, even if you're not a dj...but the respect and knowledge so you at least know about it, that just kind of adds foundation and essence into who you are. That's where it all started, you know, with the dj. Number two, it's the graffiti art or aerosol art. That's very important to acknowledge that. And there's also the b-boying that's known as breakdancing to some people, which all fall into the culture. And then obviously the mc'ing, which is being the rapper...because then the rapper isn't just discovering Tupac or Snoop Doggy Dog and it makes you a rapper. No...because there is access to the art form on its own. So you need to do a substantial amount of research to actually get into it and so on...and then the fifth element that we are trying to throw in the Western Cape is basically gaining some degree of knowledge of self...because if you have a knowledge of self automatically you will have an overall respect for the culture and for other people and other forms of music, because that is what hip-hop is all about...it's about experimenting with different sounds, different musics and so on.*

*LW: What do you mean by "knowledge of the self"?*

*Deon: Basically we're speaking in terms of history...knowing where you come from, that's a very important one and also knowing the hip-hop culture, where that comes from...Because a lot of people want to argue the point that it's an American thing but we know it's actually an African thing...because it was started by slaves, you know, black people that was stolen out of Africa, taken into America, it evolved there. It basically took off in Jamaica with the whole reggae style, went off into the South Bronx and then it became what it is today...with the heavy influence of Japanese technology...because you know with the turntables, sound samplers, boom*

*boxes, drum machines and whatever you want to call it...that's actually how the whole culture evolved. That is just a very very basic underline of what the culture is about.*

*LW: Is one supposed to master all aspects of hip-hop?*

*Deon: If you can master all of them it will be a bonus...because the whole hip-hop culture is quite visual. It's a dynamic art form and you can master each aspect...it will make you a dynamic person. 'Cause number one, to see a guy spinning on his head and doing some crazy spins...that's mind-blowing to an ordinary person already. To see a dj on two turntables doing his thing. To see somebody doing a real creative...attractive piece on the wall...these graffiti on the wall. That's mind blowing. Being able to rap in different styles...get the different styles of lyrics...to be able to do like similes, metaphors...you can throw it around and so on...it can be quite impressive...to the normal ear. That's basically what the culture is about and it's very competitive...it's a very competitive culture. Once you rise to a knowledge of self and you have a degree of knowledge automatically you know... that whatever chemicals they put into a Coke is bullshit and you don't want to be associated with that...or blah blah whatever, you know...or maybe they'll realise that Nike is a whole lot of shit because umm...how can a person...'cause they got cheap labour going in the Far East and stuff like that. That's not good for the mainstream...so that's why there is a whole conspiracy and war going against this movement...because the essence of the hip-hop culture is to uplift the people because it started out in gang infested areas and poverty areas...took people out of the ghetto. (Interview : November 1997. Cape Town).*

Black Noise member, Emile, concurs that hip-hop comprises a range of different elements:

*How you use the one skill runs into the way you use the others and whatever sounds you use is your own creation. Preferably something that's positive. My reason for staying in hip-hop is for South African youths to interact. We create a platform for youths to express themselves and also to meet others. Hip-hop is a powerful medium to break that barriers between youths. Hip-hop enables them to learn and question everything and through this they become fulfilled human beings. We even include sports in our programmes. (Interview : November 1997. Fish Hoek).*

People have the natural inclination to belong somewhere; they may form or join a sports team, or social, religious and political organisations:



*L.W: What does hip-hop have to offer?*

*Sparrow: The feeling of togetherness, we have something in common. You can grow in this environment, and the part that people must not overlook is that it is a platform where I as an individual or...my crew...can express themselves...and no matter how I feel. If I want to motherfuck I can motherfuck, if I want to shit I can shit. Whether I have the lyrical technique or expertise or not, I've got my message, whether it's positive or negative. (Interview : October 1997, Mitchell's Plain)*

The crew is a family unit and as such, it serves as refuge, resource and strength. In their behaviour hip-hoppers display the same kind of support for one another that members of the conventional family unit might experience:

*Raoul: In hip-hop you don't just care about your brothers but about others as well. If you see someone's been hurt you go and help...give them a tape to listen to with a positive message so they can see that hip-hop's not supposed to be about violence. People have this thing, it's going to be hip-hop for life and we used to like saying to be a b-boy you must sit at home and do nothing. You must go to the Base at weekends. But that's not going to do anything for you...you must have something to fall back on, I mean, you may decide to have a feeling and you can't think because you do a couple of shows a week that's going to cover you for the next month or so. The same thing if you've got a record deal it doesn't mean that if you've got a record deal now you can sit back and relax, you must have a job. Tomorrow you might not be the flava of the month. Some of the overseas artists actually have a profession, while some of the laities (youngsters) here live in fantasy land. What I said earlier on about us not having a culture, hip-hop is providing that culture, which means at the end of the day it means something to me. And to my offspring, it puts you into the mind...if you can't get out of the ghetto I must at least do something for my family. Family meaning not only your father, mother and all that. Family meaning your fellow b-boys, that's what it's about. (Interview : October 1997, Mitchell's Plain)*

Rappers feel the need to show leadership in a community where drug lords and gangsters are the only visible role models. They assume responsibility for youths who too often end up as gangsters, drug addicts, or dead. In their townships they tirelessly conduct workshops in which youths can be mobilised against social ills. They see education (not school based only) as the primary means for mobilisation and survival:

LW: *What kind of education are you talking about?*

Raoul: *We used to get books on Africa, Malcolm X, religion...you know...just trying to educate yourself. Those schools we went to were really messed up. You learn about history but it's more about his-story...it's Eurocentric. (Interview : October 1997, Mitchell's Plain)*

Hip-hoppers and youths in the townships have to attend school, learn their lessons well and find employment. Through education it is believed that one will attain selfhood. This stage is an affirmation of how hip-hop succeeds as an enabling mechanism. Hip-hop does enable, but, it may not be seen as the panacea for all personal problems. In the *Mobshop* of April 1996 Jo-anne implores fellow b-boys and b-girls with the following advice:

*If you don't have an education, you don't have a future. I know of some brothers who walk around in their Karl Kani jeans and Timberlands, got no job and practically lounge their life away. Maybe in America it can work that way, but definitely not here. Get yourself an education or a damn job. Take a lesson from some of the rappers in the States, sitting with degrees..*

However, empowered youths in the underclass can be seen as a danger to the status quo. In order to maintain control, those who dominate have stereotyped hip-hop members as dangerous. This is one reason why the SABC banned the POC song, *Ons Stem* (Our Voice [trans.]).<sup>20</sup> Until the first democratic elections of 1994, the apartheid government was holding onto its power to control the broadcast media. *Ons Stem* parodied the national anthem of the apartheid state, hence the swift banning of the song. Hip hoppers are excluded from domains where institutional power is threatened:

*Sparrow: Because (of hip-hop) you can shout...what is a very interesting subject is...it is an art form, so why are so many people so blind to it? It has been labelled, urban, underground, bad. If you watch a movie...if it's a drama or whatever...when they come to a crime scene, they play rap there. If you see the darkest scene, they play rap there. Now you see, it's like slow poisoning...we've got to read the message to believe what we want to. If you want to watch a movie...close your eyes and you hear the music, you'll know it's a gangster scene...that*

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<sup>20</sup> The song is on their album *Boom Style*, released in 1991.

*type of treatment is negative. A lot of people then say they can't listen to that but they don't take time to listen to the music properly. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

Many hip-hoppers identified Radio Good Hope (RHG) as one of their main obstacles. In Cape Town there is an underlying tension between the mainstream and the movement yet hip-hoppers function in spite of adversity. Members of the movement continue to believe in hip-hop as an alternative to the breakdown of the community in the townships. Phat feels that hip-hop teaches one respect for oneself and others; respect for others in the community is an important strategy because then it is easier to recruit and influence. Ice sees empowerment as a spiritual experience. He feels that hip-hop can be compared to a religion because as soon as anyone is in possession of a microphone, he or she becomes a god:

*For the word is strong and everlasting force to be reckoned with which controls the pen and can direct the sword to serve the light or the abyss. Thus we wield our mics and strain our voices. We made our choices, representing the silent voices. Using hip-hop as a tool and an extension of our consciousness. Not to be worshipped. But some choose to misrepresent and we clearly know where their path will end. (Mobshop, July 1996)*

## **Section D**

### **Towards a global ecumene**

Selfhood is achieved not only among hip-hoppers on the Cape Flats, but is also manifested in the relationship Cape Town's hip-hoppers have with hip-hoppers in other parts of the world. Hip-hop is a global movement motivated by common despair, rather than common wealth. Hip-hop ideology is informed by Islam and the social status of its members.

#### **1. Asalaam!**

Hip-hop subscribes to the principles and ideologies of two organisations: the Nation of Islam and the Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation. The Nation of Islam emerged in the USA as the voice of black people and has an agenda that is wholly political. It strives to mobilise black people (more recently, black men under Farrakhan's tutelage) in the ghettos against political

oppression and its vision is to build a country where black and white people share equal status. Malcolm X was the most prominent member of the movement.<sup>21</sup>

Islam appeals to black people for specific reasons. At the height of European expansion in Africa in the nineteenth century, Islam was deemed the religion of Africa. Islam grew rapidly as a form of resistance against European colonialism, assisted in its violence by Christianity. Black people in the USA convert to Islam because Christianity is associated with the legacy of slavery and white domination. Black people in the USA call themselves African-American and they adopt all kinds of idiosyncracies that they perceive as Africanisms. Since there is an historical association between Islam and Africa, rappers deem it appropriate to convert to Islam. POC member Deon has recently assumed an Islamic identity and calls himself Akil, though I am not sure whether or not an actual conversion has taken place.

Islam has certain dietary restrictions and many hip-hoppers in Cape Town refrain from eating pork and drinking alcohol. They do not consume drugs and fast foods or soft drinks either. Apart from the association of diet and religion, and the mimicing of black strategy in the USA, it is on the other hand far easier for Cape Town's rappers to relate to Islam. Most (coloured) Christian families have members in the immediate or extended family who are Muslim. To some extent, Islam forms part of the heritage of Cape Town since slaves brought from the East centuries ago were Muslim. Islam is therefore rooted among the social processes of Cape Town. In the case of hip-hop however, adopting or converting to Islam is part of a political strategy as it reinforces the notion of place, Africa, and the sensibility of blackness.

## **2. The Universal Zulu Hip Hop Nation**

The second organisation around whose principles hip-hoppers were originally mobilised is that of the Universal Zulu Hip-hop Nation (UZHNN). I am using the past tense in this case

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<sup>21</sup> The initial phase of Islam in the USA was a form of the religion based more on emotionalism than a thorough understanding of the Koran. The Nation of Islam is a radical adjunct to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Today, many Islamic communities have been established in the USA, with businesses and a college run on Islamic principles. A weakness at present is that the movement is split between Louis Farrakhan and another camp who oppose his charismatic portrayal of Islam.

because the UZHHN in Cape Town has been tailored to suit local needs. For instance, hip-hop in Cape Town is internally contested due to the different associations hip-hoppers have with regard to colour and ethnicity. There are differences in strategy. In the fifth chapter of this dissertation these differences are scrutinised more closely. In this section hip-hoppers describe how these differences, or feelings of association and disassociation, are enacted on another level, namely, around how they are organised:

*Raoul: If you're looking at the video, don't go to Emile and say "wow, you're the king over here". Emile does not want to be involved with the Zulu Nation. There were basically three movements. The Zulu Nation started in the eighties and lasted until about 1993 in this country...Zulu Nation is worldwide, African Hip-Hop Movement and the Ban the Base Crew. But they don't count that much because they were a bunch of troublemakers...and still are. The Zulu Nation was started here by King Juamu and King Shai. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

In 1973 Bambaataa formed an organisation in the USA called the Youth Organisation, which was eventually renamed the Zulu Nation. He encouraged other black youths to join religious and political organisations to deter them from gang activity. Bambaataa is a former gang member himself and has spent time in prison. He converted to Islam, an act through which he was able to reinvent his identity as a black man with dignity, no longer victim of the white man's religion. Through conversion he reinforced the distinction between "us and them"; Islam would serve as the boundary that keeps white people out and black people in.

In the USA asserting yourself as a Zulu is a form of defiance against white hegemony, since the name "Afrika Bambaataa" evokes feelings of black pride and dignity. The modern Afrika Bambaataa assumes the role of the prophet Mohammed. He uses religion and music to organise and mobilise black people against oppression. The Zulu Nation is a nation within a nation, in which Bambaataa's position is symbolic of the reinvention of ties with a mythical past that bears significance for the here and now.

The Zulu Nation has a charter around which new members are recruited and this document is known as the "Infinity Lessons 1-7". The organisation has chapters throughout the world and its goals are pursuing freedom, justice, equality, knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and "the

righteous way of life". There are obligations to the Nation. Zulus are to stay away from trouble and they are not to bring the organisation into disrepute. They are not allowed to consume pork, a basic tenet of Islam. When new members are enlisted they are to be educated about the Zulu Nation; being a hip-hop member means living by the rules of the Zulu Nation.

There is a two-tiered hierarchy within the movement. The leaders are the ones who have a great deal of knowledge about life and it is their duty to inform the ones who do not have the same knowledge (knowledge is power!). They also have to teach novices how to deal with people of all races, cultures, current events and problems that stand in the way of the Zulu. The Zulu Nation is a laager and the only weapon that Zulus have is their ideology in which music has an important role.

The Infinity Lessons describes music as the one matter expressing itself in many different sounds and in many different arrangements. Quite correct, but how does it account for the structural patterning in rap? The definition allows for a number of interpretations. My interpretation is that stylistic improvisation in black music genres, as inferred by the definition above, should be read as a rejection of the rigidity of white artistic forms. Improvisation thus signifies the alterity of black cultural expressions. People can choose how they want to participate in the production and consumption of rap music. We bring to music all our idiosyncracies and this means that music is always discursively organised. More so in the case of rap. Although rap may have a recognisable formula, such as a *phat* groove and "radical" lyrics, it is manifested as a form in which the boundaries are continually negotiated. Stylistic improvisation is the main characteristic of black American musical expressions, as in jazz. The Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation's interpretation of music confirms this reality.

### **3. Local participation in the global ecumene**

Since its inception in the early 1980s, hip-hoppers in Cape Town have been using hip-hop in the USA as a model for organising themselves. The South African chapter of the UZHFN was called "The African Hip-Hop Movement" and was established in Mitchell's Plain. The Base in Shortmarket Street, Cape Town, was the first official hip-hop club in Cape Town and

played host to the organisation. The local chapter of Zulu Nation was started by King Jamo and it soon had many new followers in the community:

*Ferdie: I got into it and then Brian X started the Nation of Islam here in Cape Town so we used to go to the meetings and stuff. We were more militant at that time and the like. It helped the people at the time, it opened their minds up to a lot of things they didn't know...and then, the Nation of Islam died and people started to do their own thing.*

*LW: What was it like to be part of the Nation of Islam?*

*Ferdie: Well, it was mostly educational. Umm, and...how to work with people man...to really go ahead with what Brian X wanted to do, because...he decided that we go to a meeting. All of us would just sit there and listen to what Brian had to say. What I did was...most of the stuff that he talked...I would like go to school in the week and I would basically spread the word. What he told me...some people didn't take it up all that well...but I think it helped me, you know personally. It opened up my eyes to a lot of things...and it helped me to survive in the world...at the moment I am unemployed but I am not worried that I'm unemployed because I can do all the things that I enjoy...I can do more things musically. (Interview : October 1997. Rondebosch)*

Cape Town's hip-hoppers are divided in their perceptions of hip-hop. They regard themselves as members of a hip-hop nation, one in which members are supposed to express a similar vision. Among members of the hip-hop nation however, allegiances are split and subject to negotiation. Despite this, the imaginary hip-hop nation is still a source of great strength. This tension imputes the movement with vigour, and it exposes the myth about the Zulu Nation being a cohesive whole. Raoul places this tension into context:

*Raoul: The African Hip-Hop Movement was started because they did not want to be part of the Zulu Nation. And you have people like Emile who associate themselves with the Zulu Nation but did not want to be part of it and now all of a sudden he's a Zulu...because he went to New York and met the people. This is really kaka (shit), because after the work we put into it, he's now suddenly a member. Here we're in Zulu Nation all these years and we don't get recognition. All the people say they're going to come to South Africa and at the end of the day they just want to sell some records. When people discuss hip-hop they don't say hip-hop is rap*

*music...dj-ing, breakdancing, graffiti, but they don't mention the fifth factor, education, as well. (Interview : October 1997, Mitchell's Plain)*

In conversations with rappers in Black Noise and POC it would seem that they are aware of the sentiments expressed by Raoul. Generally however, rappers aspire to uphold the tenets of the Zulu Nation in their music and behaviour. Black Noise proclaim its membership to the Zulu Nation in song.<sup>22</sup>

Some rappers encourage black consciousness because it confirms their status as dedicated members of the Zulu Nation and, it is a form of respect for humankind's original home, Africa.<sup>23</sup> Recently, crews in Cape Town have started working with each other as well as with hip-hoppers from abroad. Emile feels that the main reason why crews are working together more is because they have come to realise that they need to focus on the "common enemy". Subscribing to black consciousness organisations will assist in directing members' energies in a "positive direction". The future of hip-hop depends on their constructive engagement with these organisations.

Constructing an alternative world is seen as positive because it alerts members to the Zulu Nation's message of brotherhood in the hip-hop community. Hip-hoppers feel that they are being abused by the industry and the only way to counter it is by acquiring their own studios, sound systems, record labels, distribution network and shops, so that they can become self-sufficient. The difference between Zulu Nation members in Cape Town and in the USA is

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<sup>22</sup> The song is a tribute to the Zulu Nation and founders of the movement in Cape Town. It is not available on record.

<sup>23</sup> The notion of Africa as home is emphasised by black people in the diaspora. In hip-hop this association stems in part from the scientifically proven fact that the human race has its origin in Africa. See Stringer and Gamble (1993).



that members in Cape Town are based in Africa. Members do not need to reinvent their ties with Africa to the extent that their brothers in the USA feel obliged to.<sup>34</sup>

The issue is that rappers do not identify themselves simply as Africans. By propagating the notion of Zulu-ness they declare their allegiance to hip-hoppers in the USA and elsewhere. On the other hand, identifying as a “Zulu” means that the term has to be redefined. Presently, the people referred to as “Zulus” constitutes the dominant population group in South Africa. The word “Zulu” can be associated with images of power and cultural supremacy. Thus among hip-hoppers it seems that being Zulu is not about language and colour as much as it is a need for hip-hoppers to negotiate their way around social strictures. Being Zulu means, moreover, an assertion of black power and a rejection of one’s marginality. To confront the other and radicalise their place, hip-hoppers assume the stance of the noble and indefatigable Zulu warrior. The plumes and skins of ancient warriors are now substituted with what I call guerilla chic: camouflage clothing and accessories that renders the urban jungle navigable.

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<sup>34</sup> The similarity between hip-hop and Rastafarianism is striking. In Rastafarianism members express the need to defend themselves against “Babylon”, symbol of colonial oppression and capitalism.

## Chapter 5

### White coach, black coach: “Simunye, we are not one”

#### Section A

##### Wassup?: Marginalisation and ethnicity

Until the late 1970s, classical music in South Africa was performed in venues from which black people were excluded. Not only were they prevented from participation in the mainstream, they were encouraged to perform their interpretations of western art forms in the townships. On the Cape Flats there were organisations, such as the Eoan Group, that promoted classical music, mainly opera and ballet, specifically among coloured people<sup>25</sup>. They could enjoy classical music, but on the other side of the railway line. In some of the mainstream venues though, management petitioned the apartheid government for special permits that enabled black people to attend concerts. Rather than compromising principles, such as that of non-collaboration, most black people boycotted these venues.<sup>26</sup> Apartheid alone did not dictate the impossibility of integration. In many quarters, including some tertiary institutions, such as the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University, classical music was considered to be inappropriate for people who were not classified white. In South Africa classical music connoted prestige. It was one of the channels through which white hegemony could be asserted and maintained. The status of white people was elevated by the production and consumption of artefacts considered of high aesthetic value. Hence denying black people the opportunity to participate in perceived notions of refinement and elitism became a means of maintaining racial dominance.

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<sup>25</sup> The Eoan Group was the first organisation in the Western Cape to stage full-scale operas.

<sup>26</sup> The apartheid government introduced many “reforms” that the oppressed regarded as cosmetic and placatory. People in oppressed communities were mobilised to reject these changes. They embarked on a campaign of non-collaboration.

I am coloured, a so-called coloured, a lighter shade of black, black, human, African. Many of these labels I can and have chosen for myself; others had been forced upon me and were subsequently rejected by myself. One of these labels, like "coloured", was how the apartheid government identified me. At home and school I learnt that I am human. As part of my political strategy however, I choose to be black. Black represents for me not only an association with Africa, the place where I live. It is a political category too, providing a platform from which I can interpret the world around me and from which I am mobilised. In so doing, I proclaim my membership of the population group that constitutes the majority. I gaze empathetically not only to the plight of other Africans on our continent, but share in their achievements as well.

Through my allegiances I situate myself in a process where antagonistic images compete with each other.<sup>27</sup> These different positions vacillate according to social circumstances and they illustrate that I am constructed through different categories. Depending on context, they have the effect of locating me in multiple positions of marginality and subordination, or domination. These antagonisms do not operate on me in exactly the same way. As a result, I am perpetually engaged in Gramsci's war of positions (Strinati 1995:169).

Cape Town's hip-hoppers are similarly engaged in a war of positions, one in which colour consciousness is used as a medium for the assertion and negotiation of who they want to be. The war has to do with how they perceive themselves, how they come to act out those perceptions, and how their interpretations and behaviour are shaped by social and historical forces. Through various practices such as accepting, resisting, choosing, and inventing, hip-hoppers actively participate in affirming their identities. This behaviour undergoes a continuous assessment and modification in response to changing material conditions and immediate pressures.

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<sup>27</sup> Bourdieu regards the concept of habitus as an attempt to understand the unity of social practices that evolves from the production of differentiated sets of dispositions, to actions and interpretations of the world among different sectors of a population (Harker, Maher and Wilkes 1990:204). The same can be said for the individual, who, as agent, and due to circumstances, constantly has to define his or her role within society.

In apartheid South Africa, ethnicity and race were largely the inventions of the powerful who used them as ways to identify and keep groups of people apart. Today ethnicity has become the fierce possession of the dispossessed and powerless. Hip-hoppers reside in communities that are alienated and powerless. This partly explains why they use ethnicity to establish identity and distance, and, as a medium in their struggle against subordination. Below I quote the voices of rappers, each with different experiences and observations of racial inequality:

*Garin: Black youths can make money out of kwaito, coloured youths by selling drugs. (Conversation : November 1997)*

*Raoul: Nobody's prepared to sponsor rap events. People do not want to pay rap artists, like at the science and technology fair in Khayelitsba.<sup>28</sup> They say if you get refreshments that's enough. I don't want that, I want money. They won't pay because we're coloured. If it's a black artist they will pay, no matter what the quality. It's like they don't want us there. It's mere tokenism. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

Rappers play an agentic role in the construction of boundaries. They use their colour and social status as criteria for the maintenance of these boundaries. In the case of the hip-hop community, boundaries are internally contested. Rappers identify themselves as coloured or black. These are labels that they choose in order to organise themselves along differing pathways, physically and ideologically. I regard the term "ethnicity" therefore as a lived experience that fulfils the human need for identity and group affiliation. Ethnicity provides hip-hoppers with a space for organising their subjectivities. These are not only fragmented, they are constantly in process (Brah 1996:115).

For hip-hoppers the new kind of ethnicity, in which class and colour seem to run concurrently, serves as an organising principle.<sup>29</sup> It is in their daily experiences that the

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<sup>28</sup> A township for black people on the Cape Flats.

<sup>29</sup> Thompson claims that the "new ethnicity" emerged in the USA, in the 1960s (1989:91). It follows the practice of maintaining separate boundaries in which racial and ethnic groups could pursue their separate interests, provided such interests recognised and respected the interests of other and different ethnic groups.

boundaries between crews are often clearly drawn or subtly reinforced. In these experiences hip-hoppers enact their assumptions and convey messages about which identities are important to them. The process is an experience where the trajectories of colour, class, and gender interface.

In identifying themselves as black or coloured, hip-hoppers remind us that things may not have changed since the removal of apartheid. Among hip-hoppers who regard themselves as coloured the perception is that black domination has taken over from white domination. For hip-hoppers who regard themselves as black, domination is seen globally. Here it takes the form of class (capitalist) domination and racial (white) domination. Through the medium of song, dance and painting, hip-hoppers address the feeling of being politically marginalised and the discourse of ethnicity is central to their interpretations of relations of power.

Stokes holds the view that the term ethnicity allows us to

“turn from questions directed towards defining the essential and ‘authentic’ traces of identity in music to the questions of how music is used by social actors in specific local situations to erect boundaries, to maintain distinctions between us and them, and how terms such as ‘authenticity’ are used to justify these boundaries” (1994:6).

By imagining the Cape Flats as a space with competing or antagonistic images, rap music can be regarded as authentic in so far as it allows rappers to emphasise differing perceptions of the world around them. Through musical style and performance they employ these differences as a means of creating and enforcing boundaries. For instance, rappers in POC and Black Noise consciously use the music of black Americans, traditional Cape or African sounds. When these references occur in their music they demonstrate the significance of black culture. On the other hand rappers in GDP use samples for the sake of expediency

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Gilroy uses the phrase “new ethnicity” to indicate the double consciousness of African descendents in Europe (1993). He regards them as African and European. I believe that in the case of hip-hop in Cape Town the “new ethnicity” is marked by the association of colour with social class.

rather than symbolic effect. While expediency does not connote reduced importance these stylistic dialectics none the less confirm the reality of rap music as a contested genre.

The railway line has created spaces with marginalised groups of people. I regard marginalisation as a term used to describe a situation in which certain groups of people are denied equal access to power. By focusing on the processes of marginalisation, a better way of realising the systematic nature of the exclusion of some groups of young people from full participation in society and its institutions, is achieved. Hence the struggles of those who occupy the margin to seek representation within domains associated with power, represent the symbolic recovery of space that is threatened or appropriated by the other.<sup>30</sup> Marginality is a powerful space that exists as a result of the relations between those who are in possession of ideological power, and those who are excluded from this domain. It is a space of weak power, but power nonetheless.

Looking west, rap music started among black Americans as a means of expressing anger, disillusionment; to address the dilemmas of their marginalisation, and, as a form of pleasure. Similarly, in Cape Town, rap music is mediated in a domain where ethnicity assists in the figuration of rap music's meaning. Behaviour which is orientated by colour consciousness shows how their identities are generated, confirmed and transformed in the course of interaction and transaction. Hip-hoppers construct narratives that relate the experience of their statuses. These narratives are structured in performance, among conditions that are the consequences (real and imaginary) of marginalisation. GDP members feel marginalised by the black majority government and organise themselves as coloureds. These hip-hoppers are concerned that with increasing political exclusion, coloured people will cease to exist:

A black and white cloud hangs over my head  
Born and bred  
To be camouflage to be like the living dead

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<sup>30</sup> This experience resonates with Gottdiener's observation that different interest groups compete with each other over control of urban space (1986:206).

Born to behave like a blank cheque  
Born to put your own neck  
In the noose  
Born to cook your own people's goose  
Born into genocide  
The systematic suicide  
Born to embrace and love genocide  
Born into a race which seems defunct  
Are we as a race a people defunct  
GDP : "Slow Deaths"

There is, however, a twist in this worldview as other rappers, such as BVK members, do not identify themselves as coloured, yet through their songs they direct criticism at the old and new governments for the chaos in coloured townships. They reside in coloured townships and it is from this perspective that their songs and utterances may be construed as "colouredist". Other rappers, such as members of POC and Black Noise identify themselves primarily as black people, thereby articulating a black consciousness view. This gesture affirms the dialogue between past and present<sup>31</sup>:

That's right the whites taught me  
To hate who I am  
They labelled us as coloured  
But now I know I'm a black man  
(Black Noise : "Who taught you to hate yourself" : Rebirth)

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<sup>31</sup> Under the leadership of Steve Biko, the Students Association of Africa (SASO) emerged in 1968 as an alternative to the white liberal student organisation, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). In the ideology of black consciousness the colour "black" referred to all oppressed people: Africans, coloureds, and Indian descendents. Although black consciousness covered a number of different views and tendencies, its main focus was a rejection of white domination in all its forms.

The marginalised spaces that hip-hoppers occupy and the places that they represent lead to a compelling narrative of how ethnicity, by way of performance, mediates difference and consensus.<sup>32</sup> The signature tune used by TV 1 of the South African Broadcast Corporation is “Simunye, we are one”. The title of this chapter, “Simunye, we are not one”, is a line used by Gavin during a performance. It shatters the myth of national unity and alludes to the conflicting strategies hip-hoppers in Cape Town employ. The multiplicity of boundaries within hip-hop, evoked by the image of the railway line on the Cape Flats, is inferred by Gavin’s observation. The rest of this chapter is an account of how experiences of place enable rappers to build walls that are at once fluid and inviolable.

## Section B

### 1. So-called coloured folks

Music and the use of colour as a strategy for survival are not peculiar to South Africa. This situation prevails among African Americans in the USA and among marginalised communities in other parts of the world. In most cultures where music is used as part of a political strategy, music is a point of division and incipient conflict (Kubik 1992:19). Among hip-hoppers in Cape Town, emphasising your separation from the other is a crucial strategy. This strategy is divisive and it ironises the unitary function of what hip-hoppers refer to as the “Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation”. In this section I present one of the strategies employed by hip-hoppers, “colouredism”:

At a variety show in Delft, a working class coloured township near the international airport, the fourth song Black Noise performs is “Questions”. There is a verbal introduction in which Emile chides the audiences for their racist attitudes. The audience is largely coloured, and in the community where the performance takes place there is a strong anti-black sentiment. In Delft fears of a *swart-gevaar* is compounded by the fact that coloured people

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<sup>32</sup> I use the word “colour” to signify a state of awareness and “ethnicity” for when this awareness is translated into action.



have to compete with black people for housing. The lecture ends with Gavin parodying the slogan of channel 1 of the SABC, “Simunye, we are not one”. (November 1997)

For GDP members “colouredness” is their sanctuary:

*Raoul: To live in a ghetto is an economic prison. You're going to stay there forever if you don't make a way out. That's why I'm pissed off with coloured people that are out of the community and has nothing to do with the community. They can set up businesses or funds for coloured persons. Their idea of doing something for the community is coming to a little shop and buying something cheap and then saying they support the community. Coloured people just don't want to help their people out. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

According to Raoul black artists are privileged and coloured artists are marginalised by the new democracy. Moreover, the coloured laager is fraught with tension since “*coloured people just don't want to help their people out*” (Raoul). While many may regard ethnicity as a background factor, ethnicity becomes an integral and dynamic aspect of Raoul's self-consciousness and everyday discourse. Raoul and other members of GDP do not demonise black people. They see themselves as subjugated but they do not retaliate through racist innuendo:

*Raoul: If you look at Madonna and you look at Cher, they sell sex books and they say nothing about it but as soon as they start talking about rap music and they talk about sex, then it's a big thing, when they talk about violence, it's a big thing, you look at corporate America, they sell all these metal and crusher music. They talking about raping a nun and putting a cross through her heart, and they're selling that, they're making lots of money out of that. And what does white America have to say about that... “they're going through a rebellious stage”. On the other hand, when it comes to black music and they talk about I'm going to shoot that white bitch or don't light that white bitch up when you're talking about a cigarette, it's a whole racist thing. People have the wrong idea about rap music. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

The kind of awareness Raoul articulates represents a response to social situations, as defined by considerations of social status (Kubik 1992:38, Montague 1997:82). Another member of GDP ambiguously frames “colouredism” as part of a political struggle on the one hand, and as something that vacillates between black and white:

*Sparrow: The political side of it all is an interesting point. Why would any coloured label or cover themselves under an umbrella with something that has been classed as black? The answer is that we have always been the outcast and we are still the outcast because you cannot grow if you have been uprooted...where are our roots? I'm partly black, bonky-tonk, whatever. I've got a choice...I can choose where I want to be...white today, black tomorrow...there are a lot of other people that can't choose. There has only been two struggles in this country. Black against white...and the so-called coloured struggle. They'll say, "we notice you, but we won't give you the time of day". (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain )*

For many years now the issue of not having a “culture” has been a burning point for many coloured people on the Cape Flats. An explanation for these feelings can be accounted for, in part, by the forced removal in the 1960s of thousands of coloured people from an established area such as District Six, to the sprawling slums on the Cape Flats. In Cape Town displacement has taken people to an area down the road, on the other side of the railway track. Displacement has resulted in feelings of rootlessness, even after all this time:

Fragments of truth, stolen youth  
No roots, scattered past  
A jelly cast  
Can come in any shape size or colour  
So too are our people of colour  
No culture no past no tongue  
A brain no voice no tongue  
GDP : “Fragmentation”

Today it is popularly believed that black people have their “culture” and white people have their’s. Further, if one considers the diaspora as being mainly a process of displacement, then the ubiquitous sample in rap music is a metaphor for displaced people (Clifford 1994:305). In rap music sampled sounds are taken out of context, recontextualised and moved around with the assistance of technology. Thus in hip-hop personal experience and musical expression facilitates, along with the use of technology, a process of re-contextualisation, rather than mere imitation (Decker 1994:104). For young people who identify themselves as coloured, hip-hop is a culture that fills the void left by the absence of a “culture”. “Culture”

is seen not solely as “lived experience” but as a means for articulating feelings of belonging. By substituting for feelings of loss and alienation, it cements the ruptures that they experience in their daily lives:

*Ice: I think another angle of looking at hip-hop as well, and at...the places where we come from, the so-called ghettos...is the so-called coloured people as well...because the problem is among the coloured people and not so among the black people...unfortunately it has the appearance. We can relate to the culture in a better way because hip-hop is a soft(?) culture. We don't have much of a culture to look back onto. Whatever culture we've got...is without tradition. We don't know where our roots are, like the coon carnival can be seen as a show being put on for white people...and whatever your mother doesn't like, you like. You are also an individual...it's not just a matter of the sheep following the flock...it's a positive form of expressing yourself. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

The utterances hitherto verbalise how sectional identities reaffirm reality in a way that enables the group to maintain its separateness in the underclass (Woolfson 1976:185). GDP members' concern is that the new government had betrayed coloured people despite the large support given by coloured people to the liberation struggle. This theory accounts for the emergence of several organisations that lobby the coloured cause. Many coloured people feel left out by the new government and believe that they have no option but to return to a coloured fold where they can resurrect a coloured identity. A popular perception is that after the elections of 1994 power was divided between white and black people with no thought of coloured people. Instead, coloured people could be used as pawns by politicians who needed to ensure a victory at the polls. Since they do not want to remain outside of the political and social life of the country, many coloured people feel the need for an organisation that will represent their interests.

Since 1995 three organisations and a political party for coloured persons have emerged to address the problem of the coloured question. One such party is “The South African Coalition Party”. It failed dismally in its campaign to participate in the elections of 1999. Members of this party believe that there is no place for the coloured person in the new South Africa and hence, a home has to be created in the community where people who believe that they are coloured can find support and sympathy for their cause.

The sense of belonging is nurtured by hip-hoppers who continue to fill previously assigned categories with their own content, telling their own histories in their own ways and putting forth their own claims as to what their identities signify. This process is motivated by the experience of marginalisation. Being excluded from what they perceive to be the domain of power is one of the reasons for their participation in hip-hop. Hip-hop enables them, through performance, to bring attention to their plight, and, to tentatively move away from their status as victims. It enables them to symbolically challenge those in control of the power denied them in the mainstream. Thus participation in hip-hop leads to a situation where they derive a sense of power that is ironically not the power to change things; rather, performance provides them with a capacity to initiate and sustain a sense of self worth in an environment of denial.

## 2. Baby it's good to be black

My face is black as the night  
While you stand and laugh,  
you raped our people with your power.  
You've forgotten about the day of reckoning,  
my weapon is my mouth  
And it will explode like a bomb  
(POC: "Ons Stem"[Our Voice, trans.]: Boom Style)

The perceived hostility between black and coloured people is congruent with the one expressed by other coloured people who believe that policies such as affirmative action, for example, denies them equal access to employment.<sup>33</sup> The paradox becomes more complex as within the primarily coloured hip-hop community, most members emphasise their "blackness". Black consciousness is the platform from which Black Noise and POC members speak:

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<sup>33</sup> I use the term "black" not to refer to pigmentation only. In South Africa "black" is a historical category and a cultural category.

*I.W: You mention that you write and perform from a human perspective, but also, that your message is largely to promote black consciousness. What is the relationship between the two?*

*Deon: My interpretation of black consciousness is basically being humanist, because the way I view black consciousness is being conscious of yourself, your community, who you are, where you come from. So once you have peace with yourself and you are elevated to a position where you can call yourself a higher being, automatically, you'll be able to work with the masses out there. You first have to establish yourself before you can establish anything else among the people. Once you reach a conscious level you automatically move through a spiritual transition. You basically meet up with your maker, once you're on those different planes automatically you can communicate with people, work with people, and automatically, your ego get chucked out by the door, you don't think on an emotional level anymore, you start thinking mathematically. (Interview : October 1997.)*

*I.W: So is colour not as important ...?*

*Deon: Okay...well as a group, we don't rap as coloureds or from a coloured perspective. At the end of the day we rap from a human point of view and we speak about whatever influences us and our society because that is where we're situated. That's our habitat...so we speak about our surroundings, whatever affects us, whether it's on a hip-hop level, a social, a political level. That's basically the angle that we write from... and also like hip-hop basically, has done so much for me on a personal level. It made me go beyond the colour line. You see where the whole ideology comes from, the coloured factor, or the colour factor in general, you know...so that's basically the point where we come from...the angle that we write from, produce from, perform from and that's just the way we are...because the whole hip-hop culture moulded our mentalities into what it is today. At the end of the day, what hip-hop taught me was to be a good student...to be a student of life itself...that's basically what hip-hop taught me. (Interview : October 1997. Cape Town)*

Assuming a coloured identity becomes the ground for censure by others. For instance, a hip-hopper who regards herself as a lighter shade of black, but black none the less, reprimands fellow hip-hoppers for their colour prejudices:

*Jo—anne: No there ain't no fuckin' coloureds, 'cause that's a whole lot of bullshit some of us believe. That is a label some of us got stuck with from Uncle Sam during 1906. The so-called coloureds do not accept the fact*

*that they are actually a lighter shade of black, but they are and it's about time they start accepting that. The "coloureds" label their own black brothers and sisters "kaffir" derived from an Arabic term "kaffoer" which means non-believer. The lighter shade of blacks are so ashamed of their own colour and are denying any relation between the two shades. So being black is not what I'm trying to be, it's what I am. (Letter to the Mobshop of August 1996. All punctuation marks are hers)*

Before the elections of 1994, the songs of POC and Black Noise already displayed pro-black orientations. With songs like *Roots* and *Our World Dub*, POC strongly express the poetics of black oppression. Similarly, Black Noise's *Colour Ain't Shit* and *Black Facts* denounce racism.<sup>34</sup> Black consciousness, as proposed by POC and Black Noise is about colour as much as it is about the fight for justice and equality. In this sense, POC and Black Noise are motivated by the pulse of restoring dignity to black people. In their song *Da Struggle Kontinues* POC keeps the fervour of the anti-apartheid struggle alive and reminds us that the struggle for black people to achieve justice is by no means something of the past, neither is it a struggle of local import only.

To mobilise oneself and others along ethnic lines implies that ethnic activities are bound up in power relations. Deon identifies himself with black solidarity against white, capitalist hegemony. He sees the black struggle as being an international one. The relationship that South Africa has with the west is one of dependency and subordination. In his own symbolic space Deon chooses performance as a means of restoring a sense of equilibrium with the outside.

A degree of tension exists between the crews since there is a difference in political strategy. Hip-hoppers have different perceptions of their status in society. As individuals who literally live next to each other, they hold different perceptions of the same environment. The main position however, is one of confrontation between those who oppress and those who are oppressed.

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<sup>34</sup> Black Noise's song, *So-called coloured folks*, expresses the dual identities which many coloured people experience.

The colonialist master and slave syndrome has assumed a new form. It is interpreted as a local struggle for GDP, while POC's and Black Noise's interpretation of power relations has a distinct trans-local impetus. Through their utterances and behaviour POC and Black Noise propose black consciousness as a rejection of a coloured identity. They announce the important artifice of their cultural identity and its difference with others. In the process they make of their oppression a common cause with global ramifications. Their ecumenical rhythms remind us of the crucial engagement between "mask and identity, image and identification, from which comes the lasting tension of our freedom (as black people) and the lasting impression of ourselves as others" (Bhabha 1994:64).

Gilroy,<sup>35</sup> like Bhabha, sees the notion of a black cultural identity as a stringent political development. He writes that throughout the black Atlantic world one function of black nationalism has been to circumvent national categories and to turn national minorities into global majorities (1986:156). By affirming solidarity with other black people around the world POC and Black Noise share with diasporic Africans and with those on the continent the use of international frames to remedy national frustrations. For rappers with a black consciousness attitude a relationship with black people in other parts of the world is proposed by what they perceive to be a global struggle against white hegemony.

For POC and Black Noise, black is not merely a colour but also a state of mind that stresses allegiance among all those who are oppressed as a socio-economic class. It is therefore impossible to separate racial politics from class consciousness since the majority of people in the underclass will always be black. In post-apartheid South Africa the significance of the relationship between colour and class is its ability to demonstrate the inefficacy of statutory change. In a stratified society such as South Africa's class remains as one of the primary means through which hegemony is articulated. The situation in South African society shows that class is not an external social reality. As something that is lived it becomes integral to the

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<sup>35</sup> Gilroy speaks from the vantage point of a western metropolis. He coined the term "Black Atlantic" as a reference to black culture experiences in English speaking Britain and North America. He paradoxically excludes detailed discussion on Africa itself. I cite him in this case for the relevance of his discourses on black struggle and black culture.

processes whereby individuals interact, negotiate, contest and collude with the institutions of society (Wyn and White 1997:26).

In South Africa most youths are burdened with the legacy of deprivation and denial. Black youths, in particular, who had participated in the liberation struggle are often referred to as the “lost generation”. Living in the townships meant that it was incumbent upon them to participate in the struggle for liberation, at the expense of losing out on an already impoverished education system.

Further, these days young people have to contend with the failure of most economies to provide employment. The result is that significant proportions of young people are unable to sustain a legitimate livelihood. The struggle to live and survive, historically the burden of the majority of South Africans, continues to be central to the struggles that hip-hoppers are engaged in. Being black and oppressed justifies the struggle for the restoration of human dignity. It is part of a class struggle and as black people they become more exclusively identified with a particular class position. The importance of race as a category is on the decline.

Black consciousness should not be regarded as the sole alternative to “colouredism”. Not completely convinced about his “blackness”, Phat feels he would rather not construct an identity where colour is a determinant:

*Well, I don't regard myself as a coloured person because that for me, is a derogatory statement. As a black person, umm...I've still got doubts about that ...you see...because see that my roots are entwined into many many colours at present I rather say that I'm a born African to the t you see ... um ... and not try and be the partial one and say I'm a white person I'm a black person I'm a coloured person, or try to be Indian person, so you see, I see myself as a true South African, African to the t, that's how I see myself as ...umm ... I see myself as a human being first ... African second and then once again, a human being. (Interview : January 1999. Bonteheuvel)*

Through engagement with the notion of place, Phat affirms the next strand that hinges on black consciousness. His position is that place, rather than colour determines how one can



describe oneself. He compensates for the controversy surrounding colour by emphasising his African-ess. He is also a “human being”. A position that is rather vague as it does not commit him to the determinist struggles of class and ethnicity.

This is a strategy that diverts from that of the other rappers whose primary vehicles for mobilisation are colour and class. Choosing to identify himself as African means that Africa does not necessarily imply “blackness”. It is a place that accommodates people of all colours. He suggests that colour is not as important as the fact that you are African. In the 1990s one of the issues that surfaces regularly in the media in South Africa is whether or not white people can claim to be African. Phat’s position is congruent with the reconciliatory politics of post-apartheid South Africa, namely, that everyone is African.

In the section above I have included the discourses of humanism and Africanness as part of black consciousness for two reasons. First, informants regard the struggle of black people as one for the recognition of their status as human beings. Given the history of oppression of black people in South Africa, rappers seek to invert the notion of the black person as victim, or non-human. Black consciousness rappers harbour humanist ideals. In recognising and developing consciousness of their class and colour, they believe that poverty-stricken black people will eventually be able to liberate themselves from the stigma of being oppressed and marginalised. Human dignity would have been restored to all. Second, the history of people labelled black is the history of Africa itself since most of the people living here are black, or *shades of black* (Jo-anne).

## Section C

### Utopia

For hip-hoppers belonging together is a consequence of acting together. Thus collective interests do not simply reflect or follow from similarities and differences between them. Rather, they encourage ethnic identification. In terms of collective action, then, this sense of ethnic commonality is a form of social closure that defines membership, eligibility and access (Jenkins 1997:10).

Hip-hoppers share with other sectors of the community the common trait of needing to organise their social lives and in this regard their behaviour is by no means unique. Within the crew they relate effectively with each other, identifying themselves and those around them as having similar goals, behave according to roles composed of specific rules for action, and participate in clearly defined groups (Rynkiewich 1990:177). Organising their lives and social roles along ethnically drawn lines then means that a limited solidarity and common purpose is ensured.

The deployment and reinforcement of ethnicity is tied up with the issue of difference and the seeking of an identity that appears to be threatened by changing social circumstances. It is also a relic of a period of intense conditioning where people were constantly reminded about their colour in order for a racist system to function. The apartheid government was notorious for its system of social engineering. It saw the implementation of immense and violent displacement of much of its population in terms of a master-plan according to which the differentiation of spheres of life based on race and culture was enforced. Thornton observes that this “master-plan was accompanied by a master-narrative taught in all the schools, portrayed in monuments, recited at churches and performed in the sacred rituals of the state” (1996:142).

These differences infiltrated music.<sup>36</sup> Music for the white Afrikaans speaker dealt with his rootedness in Afrikanerdom. As a result of media policy and their commitment to “englishness”, white English speakers adopted white Anglo-American popular music as their own. Black musicians were encouraged to entrench tribalism in their music and music for and by the coloured person was an early hybrid of east and west, with the stark exclusion of overt African influences. Simply read, Cape Town’s rappers perpetuate a tendency initiated during colonialism and entrenched under apartheid.

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<sup>36</sup> See Hamm, C. 1991. “The Constant Companion of Man: Separate Development, Radio Bantu and Music.” Popular Music 13, 4, 147-174. Tomaselli, K. and R. 1985. Media Reflections of Ideology. Durban. Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit. These scholars analyse aspects of the ideological function of the broadcast and print media under apartheid.

Sites that hip-hoppers occupy reinforce the notions of difference and social boundary. Through their music and other expressions, rappers do not merely reflect reality. Their expressions are the means by which the hierarchies of place within hip-hop and society at large are continually being contested, negotiated and transformed. As seen in the Black Noise song quoted earlier, hip-hoppers challenge domination, they are black men after all. They refuse to be categorised by the other. In Cape Town hip-hop represents the aspirations of an age group of a particular class. As members of the Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation hip-hoppers are supposed to foster cooperation and group loyalty among crews. POC and Black Noise played a pivotal role in the struggle against apartheid because of this strength. Subjected to the whims of censors and harassment by the police, they were nevertheless able, through song and dance, to articulate the interests of the community of which they are part.

What does the deployment of ethnic strategies in South Africa signify for the shaping of identities on the eve of the next century? The post-apartheid government encourages people to construct narratives of representation. For instance, along with land restitution claims, indigenous peoples formally classified as coloured are now asserting their own identities as Khoi, San, and Griqua. They want to be recognised as separate groups who inhabit vast tracts of land away from each other. Here they can re-member their separate and distinct "cultures". Ownership of space gives them a sense of belonging, and the desire to control their own destiny. The identities that hip-hoppers have chosen for themselves cannot be seen as ones created in a vacuum. In fact, a part of constructing identities involves situating the crew in the context of those relations with the state and other crews, and specifying its position in a set of relationships and statuses. Thus in hip-hop identities are constructed as heterogeneous and partially connected. Through subjectivity hip-hoppers make sense of their relation to the world. They occupy a site-in-process through which their identities are signified and experienced (Brah 1996:115):

*LW: Can you explain why people in the Western Cape chose to adopt a movement that originates in the black ghettos of America, given all the anti-black sentiments that "coloured" people harbour?*

*Raoul: The misconception is that rap music is black...wrong...rap music is a black and Latino thing. People don't emphasise the Latino part which means brown skin. We associate ourselves more with brown skin...but there is also the misconception that it started in America...old oral traditions of telling stories. It's not an American thing. They just took something that the Watts Prophets were doing, Gill Scott Heron was doing or...from the fifties...with beat poetry and all that. They are the originators of rap music in a sense because they were doing poetry to music. It got labelled as a black thing. The Latinos don't get their due, over half the original hip-hoppers were Latinos. Look at the b-boys themselves, Latinos...graffiti artists, Latinos. The funniest thing when it comes to hip-hop...is that people say we are anti-white. Look at Europe, all the b-boys over there are white. I was talking to this black guy about rap music, how it's been changing over the years and who's the best and he mentioned a group called House of Pain which is three white persons and they are one of the top groups in America. I was talking to this black guy and he was saying that white people are taking over hip-hop but hip-hop is already taking over the corporation if you want to take out an album over there you do it through your white agent. I've got nothing against them. This one guy sings that Hitler did the right thing and it is these people that give hip-hop and rap a bad name. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

*Deon: I would say that the "coloured" community had opportunities that the other communities did not have. We had radio, we had television, so we managed to witness it first, and also, being caught up in the middle of race politics...you tend to experience things first as a so-called black community, because the poverty line is much greater on that side. I think that is part of the reason why we managed to hook onto it so easily, because we have the opportunity and another thing is...we can identify with the culture. A lot of the kids doing it in the States are the black kids and the Latino kids and the people look exactly like us. At the end of the day I would say it's just a territorial difference, that boundaries differentiate us, our way of life, our way of thinking, our genetic features are exactly the same as the people in the U.S.A. Because if you take it back twenty thousand years or twenty million years it all comes back to Africa, so we're all linked in a certain way so we have that natural attraction to a culture that is as significant as this, or any black culture, for that matter. (Interview : November 1997. Cape Town)*

The embrace of coloured and black identities and the assertion claiming them as their own suggest that South African society is marked by continuing disparities in wealth, power, and status. Ethnic categories simplify the uncertainties of post-apartheid South Africa. Crew members see their ethnic identity as an important feature of their lives, and depending on

the extent to which they interact within and across boundaries, these feelings of association or disassociation evolve into practices particular to the group. Their battleground is still the coloured or black townships girdled by the railway line, and for this reason the crews will probably always be organised along ethnic lines. The utterances of hip-hoppers illustrate the politics of living identity through difference and sameness, constructing in the process what Cornell and Hartmann call “thick ethnicities” (1998:168).

South African identities cross-cut each other in multiple ways and in multiple contexts. Bhabha’s notion of contesting and competing images are experienced within these contexts. The hip-hopper is compelled to strategically organise himself as his art continues to be used as a weapon, a means of expression, and an articulation of personal conviction. More importantly, this orientation has always and continues to develop in response to the changing social and economic circumstances of South Africa.

Hip-hop is fast becoming a global ecumene and like the railway line on the Cape Flats, it simultaneously unites people while emphasising their difference from others. Thus transnational allegiances present in the hip-hop movement suggest the emergence of a new internationalism where ethnic identities are staged and contested. However, the diffusion of hip-hop across local, national and international borders is not only as a result of ethnic identification. The visual and musical texts of the movement appeal strongly to the creative and aesthetic needs of young people. Ownership of the movement enables them to pursue ideological, political and artistic agendas.

In present day South Africa, where racism still thrives, hip-hoppers can be accused of instigating racial politics. Among Cape Town’s hip-hoppers the notion of ethnicity appears to embrace a “strongly ideologically oriented program which is prescriptive to individual behaviour on the basis of fictitious ‘ethnic’ groupings in whose formation both the communities affected as well as their opponents have a share” (Kubik 1994:43). Hip-hoppers identify themselves as coloured, black, human, African. The strength lies in being not only able to choose for themselves, rather, power is derived from choosing and acting with conviction. In assuming some form of ethnicity they assert the power to define themselves and the other. At the same time the power of the other to categorise them is

denied. Having the least amount or no access to economic and political power means that it is partly through ascribing labels that rappers are able to exercise some control over their situation, and to appropriate a part of the other's will to dominate.

The practice of using colour as a means of categorising others and oneself provides for the negotiation of how one desires to be recognised. For instance, some black American rappers, such as Niggas With Attitude (NWA), identify themselves and other black people as "niggas". In this sense the word "nigga" lends itself to more than the power to define oneself. The ebonicised spelling of the word suggests re-appropriation and by identifying themselves as "niggas", they usurp the authority of the other. The other is stripped of the power to classify, the racist connotations of the word are re-defined and layered with a street edge.

Cape Town's hip-hoppers are motivated by the symbols of commonality and rules of exclusion. Without otherness and without clearly articulating the difference between "us and them" they will cease to exist or place at risk the distinction which sets them apart from others (Bamyeh 1993:32). There is constant negotiation expressed in the power relations between "us and them". The dialectic of "us and them" illustrates that the other now occupies a discursive space, a negotiated terrain, and as such, hip-hoppers engage strategies that are open-ended, yet goal-oriented.

Among hip-hoppers there is not only the consciousness of "us and them" as determined by colour, but also the apparent awareness of "us against them". In the context of Cape Town for instance, hip-hop members who expound their "colouredism" feel they experience reality differently to black people. For the hip-hop members who regard themselves as coloured and as a subordinated group, South Africa is a country where black people perpetuate inequity. Black people no longer exist outside of everyday life and they form an identification with another form of repression.

The difference in being black or coloured is contentious and shifting. Difference forms part of a strategy negotiated in the face of a common oppressor, global, and often racial capitalism. As a group of people labelled "coloured" hip-hoppers occupy the border

between the other two major population groups.<sup>37</sup> They can choose to be black, coloured, others can choose to be white. By using colour as part of their strategy hip-hoppers attach meanings to their identities. Using colour thus, performance mediates difference and consensus. Colour consciousness helps to determine the dynamic of the mythical Hip-Hop Nation. Imagination itself is a source of power.

## Section D

### Rap, ethnicity, and hegemony

Earlier this century Gramsci coined the term hegemony as an explanation for the cultural and ideological means whereby the dominant groups in society try to maintain their dominance (Strinati 1995). Hall's interpretation of hegemony resonates with the ambivalences in the relationship between hip-hop and those who dominate in society. He regards hegemony as a politics of the real or the imaginary (Clarke et al[1975]1997). The "real" is constituted by the way in which the material conditions of the individual are affected. "Imagination" is the recognition of the self as subject/subordinate, and identification or non-identification, with those of similar disposition. Thus, hegemony occupies a "discursive space which is not exclusively defined by the history of either the right or the left" (Bhabha 1995:7). It is a process of iteration and differentiation in which domination and resistance compete.

Using Hall's interpretation of hegemony, popular culture holds significance as an area of exchange and negotiation of vested interests between dominant and subordinate forces in society. Through his dialogical imagination Hall views popular culture as a site where "collective social understandings are created" and negotiated (Storey 1993:5). It is about how people consume and reproduce the texts and practices of the culture industries (ibid:120). In this context popular culture denotes specific patterns of social interaction and the expressive forms of people's social and material lives.

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<sup>37</sup> Post-apartheid South Africans of Indian descent call themselves the "sandwich filler". Being neither black nor white they feel excluded from the previous and present domains of power.

The relationship between the dominant and subordinate classes is open to an array of manipulations. For instance, rappers in the USA oppose white hegemony and yet rap music has been disseminated throughout the world largely as a result of white-owned media corporations. These strands of domination and opposition are woven into a fabric that resonates with the experience of hip-hoppers on the Cape Flats. On this side of the Atlantic, most hip-hoppers have moved away from an anti-apartheid (hence anti-state) position to one where they regard themselves as custodians of black pride. They have aligned themselves with the post-apartheid black majority government. Other hip-hoppers are resistant to the new government. They are not prepared to cross the railway line. Cape Town's hip-hop scene illustrates how domination and resistance to it, whether local or global, is waged through the articulation of difference and similarity. Hegemony works in and around these articulations.

In the experience of hip-hop in Cape Town it is not simply Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatuses" that exercise hegemony (Strinati 1995:149).<sup>38</sup> Hegemony can be viewed as a set of differences operating in a complex unity. The South African music industry is part of this complex structure. The music industry played an important role in the marginalisation and abuse of black musicians:

*J.W: What is your relationship with the industry like? From when you started up to the present moment.*

*Shabeen: I think, no...I know, we were very naïve in the beginning. We thought okay, here's something new, something free and the first problem we had with the record company was...they were saying people are into sex, drugs and rock and roll. People don't want to hear anything about no to drugs or gangsterism and stuff like that. People want to party and crap like that. We said no, we're not changing anything. We eventually somehow got a deal and stuff and...with Teal...they weren't so bad at least because they weren't sure of how to deal with us at the beginning. 'Cause we didn't give off a very... "I didn't know what's up" kind of attitude. We were like, yes, we know what's up but we didn't know what the hell is up...so, just dealing with various other record companies and stuff like that, has really been a pain in the butt. We got problems*

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<sup>38</sup> Althusser calls the institutions of civil society and the state "Ideological State Apparatuses" (J. Clarke, et al. [1975] 1997:102). This terrain is a site of class struggle and works in part by ideology.



*from the censorship board, the record companies, A & R people...so you see a lot of stuff that hurt us. (Interview: November 1997. Woodstock)*

The discursiveness of hegemony is apparent within the domain of popular culture for here it is assumed that audiences passively consume the cultural power of dominating classes. As a form of popular music, however, rap takes on special significance. It is a genre grounded in a sphere of articulations stemming from the dialectics of oppression and resistance. Rap is mediated as a structured terrain of cultural exchange and negotiation between the forces of incorporation and resistance: a struggle between the attempt to universalise the interests of the dominant against the resistance of the subordinate:

*Sparrow: Because now you can shout...what is a very interesting subject is...it is an art form, so why are so many people so blind to it. It has been labelled, "urban", "underground", "bad". If you watch a movie...if it's a drama or whatever...when they come to a crime scene, they play rap there...if you see the darkest scene, they play rap there...now you see, it's like slow poisoning. We've got to read the message to believe what we want to...if you want to watch a movie...close your eyes and you hear the music, you'll know it's a gangster scene...that type of treatment is negative. A lot of people then say they can't listen to that but they don't take time to listen to the music properly. (Interview: October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

In this dissertation I demonstrate how hip-hop provides marginalised youths with justifications, convictions, and moral fervour. Thus hip-hoppers are not merely "transhistorical and timeless" (Lipsitz 1994:100) entities but active producers and consumers of popular forms through which they define their social space and construct images of who they are. As a group with controversial positions and radical views hip-hoppers test and confirm the dominant reality. In 1997 Gavin attended a conference for artists hosted by the Department of Science and Culture in the Western Cape. The experience he relates shows how language for instance, can be used to maintain dominance:

*Gavin: Anyway, I went there and I said I represent the African hip-hop movement and I represent Black Noise and they went like, "yo, what has that got to do with art?" I explained to them, hip hop is a culture...made up of different facets...and the kids in the community are practicing those facets...like I'm a professional artist. I started graphic designing but graphic designing is not bringing me anything. Hip-hop and*

*the artform known as graffiti is bringing me more money. I don't see any of your organisations active in our community and I live in Mitchell's Plain, and I can speak because I haven't seen it. You can go out there and you can see my murals, beautifying the community. So, we have our own media, we have everything, we've got our own magazine...so if you have any more questions, you can ask me", and they were quiet. They were talking in this meeting language and I understand it. but I was saying "look, everybody here is talking in this meeting language, you are supposed to be down to earth people, people that serve the community. A lot of kids and grown-ups don't understand what you are saying, or what you mean". (Conversation: November 1997)*

In hip-hop agency is a chronic feature of daily conduct and the main basis upon which the competence of participants is determined by others.<sup>39</sup> Marginalised people can dream of and work towards social change. The use of music as emotional support or outlet inhabits strongly the history, or lived experience of marginalised communities in South Africa. For instance, Erlmann observes that for black South African migrant workers who had been decentered, *isicathamiya* is an expressive symbol that allows them to reconstruct their universe in terms they can understand and control (1991:158). In the same way break-dance and rap music performances re-center youths. Through hip-hop performances they are able to work out and work through the natural tensions of being an adolescent.

In South African youth politics, behaviour of this kind, is not new. The years 1976, 1980 and 1985 are milestones in the history of black South African youths for in these years learners and unemployed youths took to the streets to show resistance to a racist, militaristic and capitalist state. Opposition to the state, however, was not only violent. Many youths used performing and visual arts as weapons; street theatre and community arts centres flourished as more and more youths realised that their canvasses and musical expressions can be used to inform and mobilise.

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<sup>39</sup> See Giddens (1979:57). For Bourdieu agency is confined to the "constraints of the habitus which embodies the history of the group or class to which the agent belongs" (Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes 1990:204). His concept of "habitus" elucidates the agentive roles played by hip-hoppers in Cape Town. Further, Ricoeur's view that the actions of each one of us is fused not only with the physical course of things but with the social course of human activity (performance) can be seen to operate within the confines of the "habitus".(1992:107).

The visual energy and music grooves of hip-hop, embodied mainly in the resistive gestures of Prophets of Da City and Black Noise, became deeply embedded in the domain of youth culture.<sup>40</sup> In Cape Town many of the hip-hoppers who championed the liberation struggle have now taken it to another level. The media in South Africa and elsewhere regularly report on the high incidence of crime in Cape Town. Crime wreaks havoc with township communities, yet it provides gang members with status and prestige. In more critical quarters the high rate of crime is seen as a symptom of poverty. Emile identifies crime in South Africa as a long-term effect of apartheid:

*In 1994-5 we went to all these crime meetings and I was telling the people that all the problems exist because of apartheid. We can't just forget the past because there were people sitting there and saying we must forget it and carry on with the future. Now people are coming to me and telling me that what I was saying makes a lot of sense. Although they disagreed they went home and thought about it. That album called "Pumpin loose da juice" is more realistic now than when we wrote it because people were thinking that we were being racist. And now especially older people would come to us and say it's great so people don't really buy the album but listen more to the concept. (Interview: November 1997. Fish Hoek)*

Rampant crime has turned the townships into battlefields where rival gangs violently guard their turf. As in the ghettos of the rest of the world, conditions here are unsafe because of gangsterism, high unemployment, widespread drug abuse and the disintegration of family structures of old have given way to what is referred to as "dysfunctional family units". These problems have always been part of the experience of living on the Cape Flats, but at that time the struggle against apartheid was deemed more important. Today hip-hop members present the most sustainable challenge to gangsterism, drug abuse and the uninformed choices youths make with regard to their sexual behaviour. As the marginalised youths of post-apartheid South Africa hip-hoppers have an unpromising political role. This role they perform in a situation they resent.

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<sup>40</sup> Although these crews were formed in the late 1980s members have been active in other crews and as individuals within the movement a few years prior.

The situation sketched above symbolises a world of deprivation and alienation; moreover, it allows voices of opposition to be articulated within the context of hegemonic forces that sometimes successfully conceal their agendas. As agents occupying socially determined and pre-given positions, hip-hoppers make history under structurally constrained conditions. Given these structural and cultural restrictions placed upon the choices available to young people, attempts are often made at a subcultural level to resolve the dilemmas which confront them (Brake 1985:5).<sup>41</sup> This usually occurs as a result of “the construction of specific kinds of symbolic identity, which are both unique to the group yet constitute a central bond for each member” (Wyn and White 1997:76).

Youth social movements such as hip-hop should therefore not simply be seen as imaginary solutions but also as symbolic resistance, counter-hegemonic struggle, and the defense of cultural space on an ideological level (Clarke 1990:83). Hip-hoppers choose to wage their struggle through ethnic awareness and mobilisation. The strategic deployment of ethnicity among hip-hoppers demonstrates that it is not something that they have, nor some thing to which they can belong. Rather, ethnicity and culture are complex repertoires which they experience in their daily lives, within which they construct an ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of their partners or the threatening other.

Among characteristics such as parody and hybridity, hip-hop style is about improvisation. In their music for example, rappers borrow and appropriate grooves and samples from varied sources. These are manipulated further to suit their ideological needs. Hence boundaries in rap music and hip-hop are, paradoxically, boundless. In this regard choosing an identity based upon colour is an articulation of the freedom that hip-hop provides. The strength lies in the fact that ethnicity is deployed as a basis for the mediation of expressive forms. Performance provides rappers with the capacity to represent place as a site where they can assume and live their ethnicities. The process is a manifestation of Barthes’ poetics. The issue is that ethnic awareness and mobilisation are constrained by the borders which rappers have constructed for themselves. The attempts made at challenging the status quo is

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<sup>41</sup> Hip-hoppers identify hip-hop as a movement, or culture, rarely subculture. I would prefer to describe hip-hop as a movement mediated in performance.

confined to the borders of the crew and the locations where they live. Place appears to be a crucial component of ethnic awareness and mobilisation.

Thornton posits that “one of the most remarkable things about South Africa is the multiplicity of boundaries that define it, divide it, and thereby give it shape” (1996:142). Apartheid was synonymous with the making and marking of differences that are contained within and across boundaries. These boundaries were not only geographical and ideological; they divided people in terms of colour and caused a lack of knowledge about the other. On the Cape Flats this situation has given rise to widespread hatred of the other. For many white and coloured people in Cape Town black people constituted the “other”. Thus race hatred is not only derived from feelings of racial dominance and resistance to it. It evolves, moreover, from how society is organised.

All is not lost. Up to the late 1980s the apartheid regime vigorously sought to crush all opposition. At the time rap music became a convenient vehicle for mediating the concerns, fears and resistance to oppression that youths experienced. Through the performance of dance, music, and painting, hip-hoppers continue to mediate ways of countering dominance. Hip-hop crews have emerged as a source of alternative identity formation and social status for youths in a community where institutions (including the traditional family unit) designed to foster a sense of community struggle to exist. Colour and ethnicity have become important tools in the construction of Cape Town’s hip-hop community. In this sense hip-hop is a solution that can be seen as a response to the fragmentation and loss of status of a township culture.

## Chapter 6

### Hip-hop is as hip-hop does

In previous chapters I identified hip-hop as a movement that is host to a wide range of expressive possibilities. In this chapter I consider hip-hop as a medium for mobilisation and resistance. I examine these within a particular context, the performance space. This is a space in which contesting identities or images are mediated. As such, behaviour displayed by hip-hoppers during performance reveals the extent to which power and the will to control becomes the ground for contestation. A study of hip-hop in Cape Town shows how performers encode such struggles, and help us to understand that they attempt to communicate these struggles in their performances:

*Emile: Sometimes we perform at shows and I wonder what the fuck am I doing here, like the show for the Olympics. I didn't support the bid but we were performing there and I was so relieved when we didn't get it. We appear in the show because they pay us and we didn't care a fuck...it is just our money anyway that they blew like that...life would have been unbearable in this place.(Interview : November 1997. Fish Hoek)*

Performance is a signifier that “mediates between heterogeneous worlds by constructing social spaces in which the coherence of the lived experience is re-established” (Erdmann 1991:5). The notion of space as the conduit for agency is crucial because it connotes issues related to the structuring of relativities and the subsequent negotiation of identity. Creative space denotes the existence of a sphere of influence where social relations prevalent in society are symbolised in human activity that is organised around expressive goals. Within this teleological framework hip-hoppers in Cape Town are able to construct alternatives to a social landscape that apparently mitigates against their empowerment. This landscape is chaotic, to say the least, and performance provides one of the few areas where youths are able to construct a social universe where a semblance of order is achieved. In this chapter the concerns that will be addressed are: what does hip-hop performances say about power relations between members of the crew, between the crew itself and its audiences, and, between the crew and its lived context? Further, how are the modalities of dominance and subordination communicated in performance?

A number of scholars refer to analyses where a single performance is seen as the symbolic representation of the entire culture<sup>42</sup> (Clifford 1992:98, Cohen 1993:125, Tyler 1992). To avoid the problem of under-representation this chapter contains a number of ethnographic scenes and references through which I address the concerns above. These fragmented descriptions are representations of hip-hop; by no means do they illustrate hip-hop in its entirety.

## Section A

### The performing body as social text

One of the key observations to be made about hip-hop in Cape Town is that it reflects the stereotypical role gender has in South African society. In the following scene men are portrayed as confident and women as timid:

The club is shaped like a horse-shoe with the bar forming the center of the “u”. Hard-core rap music explodes from the speakers. On the one side of the bar a group of young men watch others b-boying on the floor. Legs swirl in the air at full speed, and bodies rotate on the floor while the bystanders stare, cheering and laughing at what appear to be “mistakes”. On the other side of the bar, next to the dj’s booth in the corner, there are young men dancing in a circle. A group of young women stand at the other end of the bar and quietly watch the men dancing. They share the same space with the men, yet they seem to be removed from them as well. Eventually they start dancing on their own, in their little circle, when Deon plays songs that are more commercial, as opposed to the hard-core rap music played earlier (November 1997).

Prior to the 1980s, the study of body movement as a component of musical action was neglected. This neglect has compromised anthropological research as it perpetuated biases against the body that can be found throughout the history of Western philosophy and within

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<sup>42</sup> Erlmann holds the view that in anthropology emblematic performances can no longer be regarded as symbolic representations of the whole, for an image of a system cannot emerge from the observation of one of

social theory (Farnell 1994:1929). Closer inspection of the body in hip-hop performances therefore represents a departure from the presumed tendency to consider only the process of the performance as text. This progression signals a recognition of the role of the performer as body and as agent.

In ascribing social significance to the body there emerges one major focus: the human body as agent in a spatially organised world consisting of ambiguous meanings. In hip-hop performances the body structures its presence by its relationship with others; it moves within a social context. Hip-hop focuses on the male body. As performer the b-boy plays a pivotal role in the expression of the diverse facets of the movement. Of importance in these expressions is how the hip-hopper uses his body to articulate his social consciousness as a vehicle for establishing his personal identity. The successful hip-hopper is one who is able to juxtapose body movements with outward appearances, which ultimately construct meaning in the performer's social space (Wheeler 1991:203).

In hip-hop the body is the tool of the art as well as the art product itself. All action is mediated through the hip-hopper's body. His body is the "medium for the internalisation and reproduction of social values and for the simultaneous constitution of both the self and the world of social relations" (Bell 1992:97). A focus on hip-hop performances illuminates the circularity in the body's interaction with the environment. It generates the social context and is shaped by it in return. By virtue of this circularity, "space and time are redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting organising schemes on the space-time environment on the one hand while reabsorbing these schemes as the nature of reality on the other" (ibid:99).

## **1. Place and performance**

Below is a description of part of a workshop held at Pollsmoor prison:

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its components (1996:115). See also Clifford (1992:98), Cohen (1993:125), and Tyler (1992).



Josie, a hip-hopper from Britain, makes his second appearance on the stage. His intention is to show how rap music and body movements can say the same thing. Volunteers are called for and the same two that volunteered earlier approach the front. Josie recites the lyrics and demonstrates the movements. The lyrics are about coppers and black oppression in the UK. His movements and gestures are deliberate, his booted foot stamps down fiercely, suggesting the annihilation of an enemy. Josie uses arm, hand, leg and foot gestures to emphasise, to animate and interpret the lyrics. The movements are deliberate and driven by an imaginary pulse. Josie's arms and legs are bent at slight angles and he moves forward. He breaks the sequence into three sections and rehearses each section with the volunteers. To eliminate "mistakes" every section is repeated a few times. When the volunteers appear to have mastered the entire sequence, it is presented to the audience. This seems to be the highlight of the workshop because the reaction by the audience is overwhelming. The importance of this exercise is in how, through imitation and repetition, the youths are able to acquire at least some of the skills available to hip-hoppers. (December 1997)

Farnell observes that during performances "waves of feelings are generated in the body and between bodies, and discrete sequences of tempo and patterns of movement can be discerned, analogous to the ebb and flow of the music (1994:14)". A pattern of interaction and movement emerges between the performers themselves and between them and the audiences. This results in a kind of tension that takes shape from within the body. This tension is directed by flows of energy that move beyond the dancers' conscious attempts to manipulate the situation. Within the context of hip-hop dance can be seen to transmit messages that affirm the constructs of place and social identity. Audiences are entertained and informed by the dancers' overt and subliminal codes within particular contexts that fix both audience and performer as dialectical emphases. These emphases are transient since the same format is continually relocated in different arenas.

The performing body is ideologically significant because it denotes a symbolic way of life and its reception by others draws together those who idealise it, and alienates those unfamiliar with it. In the performance of rap music and dance this position generates a complex web of intricacies that requires two levels of unpacking. First, in a visual context b-boying may be examined through body image and a style of movement that contain codes of

meaning related to culturally-bound practices (Sherlock 1985:41). Dancers usually hold their bodies in positions that seem to indicate defiance. What are they in defiance of, one may ask, especially since this gesture is contained and only expressed during performance? More importantly, why is this resistance being waged in the performance arena and nowhere else?

Second, most of the movements are cyclical. In dance the cyclical gesture becomes a micro-imitation of natural phenomena, such as seasons and so on, as well as the rites of passage we participate in, from one generation to the next. In hip-hop the circle seems to indicate the establishing of a territory in which the limbs inscribe circular boundaries in space. In his revisionary examination of African oral poetry Brown observes that the principle of circularity is characteristic of many poems and stories (1998). As symbol then the circle is not only traditionally “African”, the place is important here because hip-hoppers identify the movement as inspired by the continent. In addition, the circle is a harbinger and metaphor for the sanctity of the crew and the individual b-boy. It marks their turf. Indeed, their circular movements suggest individual space on the one hand while on the other the extent to which this space is maintained is subject to negotiation. Negotiating the boundaries of personal space is enacted only among fellow hip-hoppers. This process is selective and not open to just anyone.

The boundaries hip-hoppers inscribe denote the flexibility and temporality of space. Through generating and sustaining boundaries exclusivity of the performing body is maintained. Yet the display of similar behaviour by other b-boys in the same context renders it a communal experience. As b-boys explore the different ways of being in collective contexts, their active participation becomes the forerunner to important social action. The performance space is the arena where battles are won and lost, it is a place where the b-boy is able to transform himself from victim to victor. The performance arena is surrounded by the imaginary border that keeps the outsider out. Power generated by and through the performance helps to maintain these borders.

Hip-hoppers have come a long way, from performing in the streets and challenging the police during apartheid, to being recognised and accommodated by the institutions of the new government. The skills and experience they acquired over the years have become the

vehicle for mediating their bodies as instruments of power within a larger, and more powerful domain. This domain is the discursive field in which power circulates. This process brings to mind the ambiguities of power relations. For instance, in the workshop held at Pollsmoor prison the temporary appropriation of institutional space has to be recognised as the resistance exerted by disadvantaged young people, not only against mainstream institutions, but a struggle for a place within them as well. The utterances and behaviour of hip-hoppers seem to refer directly, and indirectly, to the constant negotiation, tensions, and contradictions played out in this domain.

## **2. Language and performance**

*J.W: What is the hip-hop lifestyle about?*

*Sparrow: It's the way you talk, the way you walk... whatever you do is hip-hoppified. (Interview : October 1997, Mitchell's Plain)*

Having identified performance space as a place for the negotiation and assertion of power, I want to contend further that performance allows those who inhabit this space the power to create and evolve cultural practices of their own. Some of these practices are borrowed from the mainstream. While these processes evolve as a direct consequence of the relations between the margin and the mainstream, they emphasise those features of the margin that influence the character of that particular movement. In hip-hop these processes are manipulated to affirm identities, structure relationships, and, provide the impetus for agentive behaviour. Communication through the use of language facilitates these processes. The use of language is not only reflexive, it constitutes human experience as well.

Language enables hip-hoppers to key their performances in culturally-conventional and culture-specific ways. Language is mediated as an additional form of communication. Since performance is a social activity, it shows that language is a social and collective construction with performative qualities.

Language plays an important role in the way that its adherents structure and manipulate it. The verb “plays” helps to define the role that hip-hoppers have created for themselves. For in using language thus they derive a sense of control in performances as the language is most often a hybridisation that reduces unfamiliarity and awkwardness. Moreover, “play” means pleasure, hip-hoppers use a kind of language that reflects the history of and tensions among Cape Town’s people. However, a great deal of pleasure is derived from inverting the seriousness of the situation with jokes, teasing and boasting.

Hip-hoppers bring into their performances the language of others and their own. It is through the application of language that the other’s language and sphere of influence is relocated and rendered discursive, as it comes into play with the language hip-hoppers use for the structuring of their own identities. In this kind of reflexivity hip-hoppers create for themselves a language that is essentially hybridised. By hybridisation I mean that they combine a number of social languages within the arena of the performance, the rehearsal, and ordinary interaction. Thus the performance or rehearsal arena can be read as a place where a hybrid linguistic expression suggests authoritative power. It is in this arena where linguistic consciousnesses collude and interact.

Rap music provides a forum for the exchange and collusion of linguistic codes. *Turn it up, jou lekker ding, Eli Bali Lakhè, Dallah Flet* are titles of songs by POC and Black Noise. On reading them they elicit not only literal interpretations, more importantly, they signify to a large extent social processes such as ethnic diversification and collusion, structuring and orientation with regard to place, and, linguistic reflexivity. These processes may be accounted for by the political history of Cape Town, and South Africa.

In the first chapter of the dissertation I describe Cape Town’s hip-hop language as a hybrid, and as an expression of voices from the margin:

*Emile: We get the same thing...we performed at the Arena with Positive Black Soul and we got the same ribe...you know, with the kids over there. I took advantage and said normally they won't let me into a club dressed like I am now and everybody just laughed because I was speaking Afrikaans and this one friend of mine...also came there with an accent and said that don't you know the Afrikaans market is cornered by*

*POC. There's no fucking market...I speak to those laaities (youngsters) like I speak to my crew...and when I speak on the Cape Flats that's how I normally talk. If they feel ashamed of speaking like this then it's their problem. (Interview : November 1997, Fish Hoek)*

In BVK's language style processes described in the first chapter converge:

*Phat: Umm, basically...our musical style is basically a format...that can relate to many a people and what we try to establish is the way we speak as language, you see...umm, because a lot of the people tend to say that the way we speak Afrikaans is not the proper way of Afrikaans but I beg to differ because the way we speak Afrikaans is the proper way. It was (clears throat), it was spoken many many many years ago...you see...seeing that umm...Afrikaans is is is is totally broken, but then again umm...garbled speech, not sure ...but then ouens can tell me your work is not original but then I can tell them yours is not either because you got certain words in so the way I see...our music is like direct through the people through the people and it's more a learning channel you see, because you can't put a language in a dictionary. Because every day a new word develops man, irrespective from which genre it comes from, it does develop...it's like, it's like a human. From baby to child, from child to man, from man to old person and eventually the word goes out man you see...but it's always there in the nitty-gritty, that is our music you see, it's about life. (Interview : January 1999, Bonteheuwel)*

The language hip-hoppers use is a crystallisation of the situated choices and combinations of possibilities provided by the varieties fully or partially available to them. The language is not merely a way of speaking, but also a way of acting and being. Everything is *hip-hoppified* (Sparrow). In so doing language provides the metaphors by which the individual connects to hip-hop. Performance is a communicative process and is effective when performers display competence in physical and verbal utterances. Competence, however, is negotiated according to the terms established by the group during performances or rehearsals. To what extent does the use of language influence degrees of competence in performance?

There are two levels at which hip-hoppers engage language. First, there is a language for the in-group. They speak this language to no one else but the crew. The moment they come into contact with each other they exchange greetings and gestures that are learned among the crew. They gain some of their power through word-of-mouth and learning to speak the

language becomes a rite of passage that allows them entrance into the inner sanctum of the crew. Crews are male, and the language they employ effectively seals the brotherhood.

Hip-hoppers use their language to mark their borders and protect the crew against outsiders. The language is flavoured by slang, and coded abbreviations. Slang is typical of small and close-knit communities that share knowledge and interests. It emphasises the values, attitudes and interests of hip-hoppers; it marks social and linguistic identity. The use of slang connotes a powerful experience since its use among hip-hoppers defies linguistic and social convention. This power is related to the high level of confidence embedded in masculinity (De Klerk 1995:267):

*Shabeen: As far as that goes I think that belonging to POC we contributed a lot in that sense and, being involved with school tours. As far as the media and that type is concerned it means absolutely nothing, I find more joy if somebody comes to me and say that, "the line you used in such and such a song where you used alliteration into a metaphor into a simile into a pun, like in two lines, yo, that was kawaii (great)". So, if somebody comes up to me with that from wherever. Then I think, yo, somebody actually listens, djits (great). Then somebody comes along again and shouts "wow! that was great" and then I think, bull, man. If somebody can comment on what they've done creatively or what they try to get across in an artistic manner then you really feel wow, shit somebody's listening. It's just the teeny-bopper type of mentality, that's crap. (Interview : October 1997. Woodstock)*

The utterances that are often perceived as slang have evolved into a distinct and cleverly coded language within a language that those unfamiliar with the Cape Flats argot have a difficult time trying to understand. Meanings of words often follow moods and expediency. Interpretation that is contextually derived is a key towards understanding what particular words mean, especially in relation to performance style. This I discovered as the field became more familiar. Outside of the performance arena their slang can be regarded as a social dialect within a regional dialect within a language. This may be seen as a contribution to the linguistic pool that is unique to Cape Town.

Code switching is another feature of language play among hip-hoppers. For instance, at the demonstration in Mandalay hip-hoppers spoke to the audience in English and Afrikaans, as

they are popularly spoken on the Cape Flats. Code switching can heighten attention to competing languages and varieties to such an extent that identities, social relations, and the constitution of the community itself become open to negotiation (Bauman and Briggs 1990:63). In verbal exchange code-switching and code-mixing are unconscious practices where speakers are playing with the languages, juxtaposing elements from each to create a particular effect (Mc Cormick 1995:93). None of the participants notice where switches occur. This happens because frequent switching is part of the normal way of talking not only outside the hip-hop community, but inside as well. In hip-hop it is a marker of the community's sense of place and identity. In their songs however, the choice and mixing of codes is deliberate. Through ambivalent practices of the language they remind us of their power to control its course.

The second area of linguistic prominence is displayed during performances. Here too the crews demonstrate linguistic ambivalence for the language they use is determined by the social context. For instance, they train or rehearse in their own language but in performance, communication is tempered by the type of audience they encounter. In the workshop held at Pollsmoor prison, members of Black Noise speak in the language used by prisoners mixed with the language that they generally use. At a concert in Wynberg, a middle class suburb not on the Cape Flats, the performance was reserved and performers lacked the usual desire to engage the audience. Dialogue was restricted to introductions and in a style that suggested a social barrier between performer and audience. There was very little verbal dialogue, even from jungle group Nine, their peers on stage. It appears then that hip-hoppers can read a crowd and adjust their verbal interaction accordingly. They exercise linguistic ambivalence. Hip-hoppers use their language strategically:

So step up if you don't know what DSA means  
Or x-plodes many tricks and then he picks a mix  
More accurate than 1026  
Or when he kicks ballistics  
I drop linguistics on this mix  
So stay back 'cause I'm a maniac  
Time to back the ones who say that

The prophets cannot really drop it  
(POC : “Hard Time on Stage” : Boomstyle)

This guarantees the unity of their language and its comprehension by all the members of the hip-hop community. On the other hand it guarantees the discursiveness of their language and its incomprehensibility to others. Enactment through a specific language means that Cape Town’s hip-hoppers constitutes a speech community. One in which they have constructed their group identity by making use of a set of distinctive communicative means from among their resources (Morris 1994:26).

### 3. Clothes and performance

Since the inception of hip-hop clothing has been a strong means of identification:

*LW: Why do you wear military clothing?*

*Hamma: This is actually from one of our sponsors, “I looligan”, that want us to promote their clothes. It’s a British company. This clothing was more of a fad but is here to stay. Some people say that the clothes are to symbolise the fact that the township or urban areas is like a war zone. You have to be very alert and aware. When Public Enemy dressed like this they said it was because they were living in a state of emergency. They wanted to project the image of people that are ready for war, not just physical but in a mental and spiritual way also. Other people wear the clothes just for fashion and they don’t care what it means. (Conversation with member of BVK : October 1997)*

*Raoul: The corporate world take from hip-hop. Adidas used to be like North Star or Argo. The laities said the clothes are lekker (great) tight for breaking, they put it on, they do their thing in the road or house party or block party and the ouens (dudes) would say that’s phat gear and the guys go buy it. Adidas saw that, Nike saw that and they started making the stuff more expensive and started bigger lines and look at them now. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell’s Plain)*

An associative reading shows that in the performance of dance and music meaning is conveyed through additional channels such as clothing style, for example. In performance



the chief concern is with the cultural processes and products that are externalisations and extensions of the body in varying contexts of verbal and non-verbal communication (Blacking 1977:2). If one is to understand subcultural style as the “expressive forms and rituals of groups that are signs of identity and sources of value”(Hebdige 1983:2), then it is through their clothing and language that hip hoppers project another form of confidence. This style is communicated along with their music.

Clothing is a primary non-verbal site through which hip-hop members convey meaning.<sup>43</sup> They accept the centrality of consumption and commodities in contemporary culture and they assert their prestige as innovatively as possible with the appropriation and bricolage of brand names and expensive street fashion. Through their apparel hip-hoppers express a cultural identity, and visual communication is established long before verbal interaction transmits whether verbal exchange is possible.

Dress signifies the individual's allegiance, and in the process the individual is simultaneously differentiated from the rest. These significations are condensed in hip-hop performance. The individual is part of a specific group and outside of another. B-boys wear expensive training clothes for practical reasons mainly, but the labels they choose to wear show that they are setting trends. A form of solidarity is expressed in the way they dress and this behaviour “becomes not only an answer to the question of who one is, but how one is” (Barnes and Eicher 1993:2). Their clothing style has social meaning and it contributes to the performance aesthetic.

## Section B

### 1. The rehearsal

*Phat: I believe a rehearsal and a live performance are the total opposite. A rehearsal is planning, live performance is attention...and at least you know it's done. What happens at a rehearsal happens, rappers rehearse here, dancers and dj rehearse there and when the show happens the two combine and the whole stage*

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<sup>43</sup> In one of their songs Black Noise sings about having their Adidas stolen.

*crack into two basically...because we're excited because we're together. (Interview : October 1997. Cape Town)*

Break-dance requires a great deal of preparation. The emphasis is on rendering a performance that is unique. While it has to include traditional actions and moves, style is largely determined by how well dancers innovate. B-boys push the boundaries of conventional break-dancing style. They receive recognition from among their peers and from the audiences for their ability to emulate traditional movements as well as for their ability to be innovative. These innovations render each performance unique. Respect for the dance is simultaneously demonstrated through innovation and a regard for traditional gestures and movements. Moreover, it is through performances of these dances that conventional codes of masculinity are deeply affirmed. I describe below a rehearsal in which Black Noise is preparing for an international break-dance competition to be held in Germany. Each participating country has ten minutes to perform; part of the sequence is to be performed to music that they do not know. The venue is a recreation centre on the border of Mitchell's Plain:

There are five crew members. The first thing they do is change from their normal clothes into clothes designed for rugged physical activity. Emile introduces me to each member. The rehearsal starts with each member doing warm-up exercises. There is light banter and conversation in-between. After the warm-ups are completed, the group divides into smaller units in order to practice specific steps that will eventually be joined to build the entire sequence.

They start the sequence with basic walking steps, knee-spins and walking. One of the dancers is left standing alone as the other four, divided into units of two each, practice a new and seemingly complicated manoeuvre invented by Emile. The new movement, like most other movements in break-dancing, is cyclical and it involves partner A holding partner B from the rear, firmly under the shoulders. A rotates B at waist level while A swings his legs over B with each rotation. Of course the practice round starts slowly and the speed increases as they become more confident with their moves. The movements seem laboured.

A then releases B and with the resultant momentum, B is flung to the side where he performs a windmill<sup>4</sup> and a flare at terrific speed. This segment ends with B sitting in a squatting position. The new movement is not merely an invention but also a signature that would customise the crew's performance. The new movement appears to be quite dangerous and I am sure that only experienced dancers would be able to attempt it without risking injury. The experience is painful because one of the dancers contorts his face and rubs his shoulder blades after every practice round.

The mood during the rehearsal is informal yet fraught with the desire to obtain competence. There is an air of confidence that is taken for granted since it is assumed that the partners can trust each other. The dancers need first to have built mutual trust anyway since many of the movements require confidence of the self as well as of the partner. As the moves are rehearsed there is a great deal of critique and encouragement among crew members. Gestures are isolated and its potential within the sequence is discussed. There are many suggestions as sometimes, more than one member may feel that a particular move or approach is inappropriate. There are moments of comic relief when a mistake is made or when a member appears to be out of character.

When the rehearsal for the entire sequence starts the moves are practiced without the music. The dancers position themselves into two rows, three in front and two in the rear. Before the dance starts, they prepare by counting: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4. Once the actual dance starts, they stop counting and all one hears is the sound of squeaking shoes and abbreviated prompting. One of the dancers seems to be unsure of the sequence. He fumbles around while the others, seemingly oblivious of his insecurity, continue. However, the sequence is abandoned when corporate loss of control appears imminent. The objective of the rehearsal is to build coherent and collective thinking for a common result. This is of course compromised whenever control is lost.

Once they have reached a level of reasonable competence the dancers decide to practice the entire sequence, first without the music. Later, when they feel more confident, the music is

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<sup>4</sup> In this move the dancer rotates while lying on his back. While rotating his spinning legs are held in a v-shape.

added. Mistakes are made and this interrupts the flow of the sequence. They stop and start a few times but eventually they stop completely since they are unable to make reasonable progress. At this point Emile invites me to offer some critique. I felt a little uncomfortable since I had just met some of the members a short while before. Furthermore, at this stage my knowledge of break-dance was inadequate, I lacked the confidence to evaluate their style (October 1997):

*I.W: You don't rehearse regularly for performances but are there any other forms of preparation?*

*Shaheen: Well...there would be like one rare rehearsal every six months or whatever and then because we performed a lot overseas, like two gigs a day, one in Holland the next in Germany on the same day. The groups are so crappy there so once you go on there and you feed off one another and you click, so you wouldn't rehearse but maybe there's something that worked in the previous show and we didn't even discuss it and then you just find it in the next show because a person felt it went down lekker (well). So a lot of it has to do with the vibe 'cause if you have a smoothly worked out show, but if you do that over and over and over it's not going to have the same vibe. It's going to be like a set gedagte (idea) and you're going to lose a bit of whatever because there's got to be some form of spontaneity or improvisation somewhere for the compressed vibe to come through. (Interview : October 1997, Woodstock.)*

To avoid performance death *there's got to be some form of spontaneity or improvisation* (Shaheen). There is a great deal of improvisation in the content and presentation of hip-hop. Some of it is instinctive or experientially derived. Hip-hop performance is not a lawless form but a process with internal structure. Where does the process begin? With organisation, and organisation begins with the rehearsal. It is through rehearsal that the b-boy begins to structure his world. The rehearsal is a process that is articulated as a result of the fit between the constituent parts of the whole. Assembly of the performance starts with the rehearsal, the area where thoughts and personal persuasion are manipulated to effect appropriate behaviour.

The behaviour demonstrated in rehearsal is not only collective, but is also coded and bound by conventions formulated through a history of personal involvement with each other. In other words, behaviour displayed during the rehearsal is spontaneous as much as it reflects

rules that are communally arrived at. In rehearsal social interaction takes place within a structured context that is mimetic of everyday life and within a variety of social groupings. In the rehearsal there are certain practices that suggest the imitation of what is sometimes perceived as a democratic society. Not only is verbal participation among members almost mandatory, but as an outsider I was drawn into and made part of the rehearsal, albeit as critic.

How does communication during the rehearsal affect participation? First, when a new move is introduced all instructions take place through demonstration. The process becomes a kind of gestural “call and response” as the leader demonstrates the new movement and the others follow suit. The new movement is subject to further manipulations that are derived from how the other hip-hoppers wish to interpret it. Inevitably mistakes are made and this would mean that the others have to repeat the movements until consensus is reached.

Second, critique and assistance takes place through demonstration aided by verbal communication. Communication takes place purely in the vernacular. For instance:

*Emile: Hosh, gazlam! (Hello brother)*

*Phat: Hozit my bra? (How are you, brother)*

Crew members are critically engaged in the process of structuring their rehearsal. The efficacy of a particular movement is discussed, and depending on its viability, the movement is altered, accepted or rejected. As the dancers rehearse they observe each other. In evaluation this behaviour is essential for their discussion can be objective, as well as complementary.<sup>45</sup>

In general, their verbal communication is fragmentary, yet clearly understood. Brief verbal exchanges are by no means a shortcoming for through the discursiveness of the rehearsal

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<sup>45</sup> Feld identifies evaluation in performance as a process based on interpretive moves (1994:87). The assessment of a sound event is often based on an interpretation of competence.

process emerges a performance format that is cohesive. Furthermore, no attempt is made to write or record the rehearsal or conversations through other media. The crew members rely entirely on their memory and repetition. Hip-hoppers do not acquire their expertise and wisdom solely through what we know as study. Through verbal interaction and reliance on memory they express their commonality with cultures where oral forms are valued as sources of information and used as a means of fomenting social cohesion.

The crew deploys the maximum of resources at its disposal. As in a recording studio, it is not only the behaviour that is collective, but also the composition of the performance. Through the rehearsals dancers seek to refine their expressive behaviour as a mode of communication in order to render a performance that is unique to hip-hop. On the other hand, a great deal of the particularities of break-dancing are in a sense borrowed and appropriated from other sources. Crew members learn by intimate apprenticeship; by listening, by repeating what they see and hear, by employing gestural idioms and learning ways of combining and recombining them, by assimilating other bits of wisdom and as Shaheen infers in the interview above, by participating in a kind of collective recall. Participation of this nature feeds on the intimacy of face to face contact and as in many normal conversational practices, dancers use gesture to accentuate their words and sentences.

My impression of the rehearsal is two-fold. The way in which the hip-hoppers communicate shows a willingness to learn that has little to do with ego (during rehearsal only) and a great deal to do with promoting their movement as a collective. The ideology of the Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation is constructed by way of symbolic, verbal and physical exchange. Through participation, hip-hoppers show commitment to expressive behaviour that one would not normally encounter among many young people. The rehearsal becomes not only a rehearsal for a competition or concert, but also a forum for exchange and negotiation. Behaviour during rehearsal facilitates the practice of maintaining constructive decisions that facilitate collective behaviour because they are reached through negotiation. In addition, a collective vision mediates between the composition and realisation of the performance. Through co-operation a sense of loyalty and reciprocity is initiated and maintained. These ties define membership and closure.

## 2. The competition

It is a hot December evening a few days before Christmas. The entire day spraypainters have been busy painting the outside walls of a night-club. For two weeks prior to the competition workshops and demonstrations were held in townships all over the Cape Peninsula. Tonight's competition in Mitchell's Plain is the culmination of the two-week festival of hip-hop in Cape Town. There is a lot of activity inside and the club is filled with young people. The dj plays loud club music. A group of people are dancing on the floor:

*LW: When you dance, you most often don't use rap music. What kind of music is it?*

*Emile: It's what they call "old school electro funk". It was created during the period of the birth of hip-hop and with the kids. But if that is not available the kids will dance to anything. But it's a more hyped-up kind of music. A lot of the dancing is borrowed from everywhere including tribal dancing. It's given a street edge, a lot of power into the moves. (Interview : December 1997. Atlantis)*

An announcement is made for the b-boys to prepare for the competition that will commence shortly. There are a number of crews from Mitchell's Plain, Kraaifontein and Stellenbosch. They have names like Ghetto Crew and Azanian Flames.

Between the stage and the dj's cubicle a rope is arranged in a square to demarcate the arena where the b-boying competition is to be held. The audience and rival crews arrange themselves around the arena. The b-boys are dressed in their branded gym clothes and running shoes. Some of them wear woollen caps with padded tops. They wear this headgear to execute the headspins and prevent scalp burns.

Before the actual competition, the three judges, from the "old school" (founders of the movement in Cape Town) approach the dance arena to give an impromptu demonstration. They move around clumsily and it appears that they are out of practice. They complete their sequences rather quickly. There are visitors from abroad who have been attending and assisting with arrangements for the festival. It is their turn to dance. Their appearances are brief and once these spots are over the competition begins. The crews will be given ten

minutes each. Gavin is emcee for the night. He reminds the competitors that they must have style and rhythm, without which their dances will be mere gymnastics.

One of the crews enters the arena and the members line up next to each other. Some of the crews have up to ten members; many of their members can be no more than eight years old. The music is hard-core rap with a fast tempo. From their positions in the line, each member comes to the floor to show off his skill. Their gestures and movements are well prepared. Spellbinding sequences of headspins, twirling legs in the air, all add to the excitement. Their sequences include the usual hip-hop steps as well as their individual signatures. B-boys from large crews are able to dance in groups of twos and threes as well.

Once all the members of a particular crew have finished their individual sequences, the entire crew takes to the floor in a final unison dance. During the dances audience members gesticulate wildly and encourage the dancers. The encouragement becomes more enthusiastic when the dancer executes a movement that seems dangerous and new. Some of the movements appear to be extremely risky. The dancers seem intent on impressing the audience as well as their rivals, the rowdier the audience the more energetic the performance.

Audience reaction seems to stimulate the level of performance. When audience members participate in the groove it enables them to communicate with the performers as well as with their peers. Through cheering and gesturing they articulate their sentiments, and it is in their articulations that success or failure can be measured. This is the first round of the competition. The judges will decide who the finalists are and they will then be called upon for the final round. Members from other crews watch their rivals closely. There is no verbal communication yet the postures they maintain, with a kind of "come and get me if you can" attitude, seem to suggest confrontation and anticipation:

*LW: What are the best kinds of performances for you?*

*Emile: The best is probably at schools and at the same time places where nobody expected to see any breakdancing. It's the first time that they see it and their minds and eyes are not accustomed to what they're seeing. It's like a magician's tricks. When he goes slower and slower you can make out what's going on. The*



*school again because the kids enjoy any form of entertainment. They check that they can also do it. When I write songs and because of the teaching...people must learn from what I'm saying. If the song is about enjoying themselves it must be interactive...that's why, if I can shock people then I'm happy. If they want me to do something just for the sake of doing it then I don't want to do it. I don't believe all crowds are the same. A lot of times I would do the same thing for two different crowds. (Interview : December 1997. Atlantis)*

Next on the agenda is the emceeing. This part of the evening takes the form of an open mic session where anyone can come up to the stage and sing. The visitors from abroad have joined up with E'avaron and their stage name for the evening is the "Erotic Hermaphrodites". Falco is the mixer at the turntables and after the musical introduction on the backing tape, the singing commences. Each member of the group has a microphone. The visitors are from Sweden, Germany, France and Australia, and they sing in their respective languages.

This part of the event turns out to be more display than participation. Members of the audience are invited to join the singers on the stage with their own rhymes, and to battle with other emcees, in what is called an open mic session. However, this session can hardly be called an open mic session. While rappers are singing, the audience responds feebly. It is hard to imagine that this audience is the same one that had participated enthusiastically a few minutes earlier. The music seemingly has no effect on them and I was told later that the audience was not really a hip-hop crowd. The audience's behaviour is cause for further speculation. What, I wondered, is the barrier: language? What the audience saw on the stage is a group of white men singing rap in foreign languages. The music has a dance groove and one expects a positive physical response to the beat. By withholding their applause the audience exercises its power to marginalise hip-hoppers even further. This motivates the hip-hoppers to work harder:

*Hamma: When I get on a stage I give everything. It depends on the crowd...I give more. If it's a dull crowd I put in more and I try to get them to respond. If it's a good crowd I still put everything into it. (Conversation with BVK member, aka Roger : October 1997 )*

Unless the audience is what performers describe as a “hip-hop crowd”, responses at concerts are often poor. A while before this competition I had attended a variety concert in Delft where the audience reacted in the same way. At this show there was a great deal of applause for those artists who did covers of American songs, yet the response to the performance by Black Noise was relatively feeble. I asked Emile to interpret the response at the Delft concert:

*It's like fighting a losing battle because you can't make contact with the crowd. With that performance, I knew already what the crowd was going to be like. Whenever we do a show most of the people always do these cover versions, that's just the reality. When we go onto the stage we think, yo, what's the crowd going to think but after a while we don't give a shit. Black Noise has nothing to prove anymore...we've proven by now that with the work we've done, we deserve to be on the platform. And we can say what we want to say and if people don't like it then it's their problem. People are different, like and dislike are various. That's another thing that the group gets upset with me about...because I would say, this is a rock 'n roll crowd or a covers crowd.*

*LW: Couldn't you negotiate where you wanted to be placed?*

*Emile: We did actually. We wanted to go on immediately after interval because we knew that would be after a fresh break...and then one of the managers came along and said his group won't be long, but they carried on forever. I think he wanted to position himself there because he knew that after we were on people would think it an anti-climax. (Interview: December 1997. Atlantis)*

Sometimes hip-hoppers do make a concerted effort to engage the audience. Although the formats of the performances themselves are fairly consistent, there are differences in the way that crew members interact with one another and with their audiences. Some of the performances are rigid and controlled. On one occasion however, I attended a workshop where the performers' behaviour was spontaneous. This is my observation: When an appeal is made to the audience to participate, they might be reluctant and fail to respond. On such occasions, the crew or a member of the crew will quickly demonstrate a dance move or sing. This can be seen as an opportunity for the artists to demonstrate their improvisatory skills as well as their technical expertise. Improvising sustains the flow and is in keeping with the

aesthetics of hip-hop and rap music. Behaviour such as mixing a groove on the spot, appropriating sounds from a myriad sources, and displaying one's dance signatures, suggest that spontaneity in performances may lead to the success of a concert or workshop (December 1997).

After a while Emile makes an announcement that the final round of the b-boying competition is about to start. Three crews have made it to the final round. The arena is set out on the dance floor and the crews line up outside the rope. The procedure is as follows: two out of the three crews combat each other at a time and the two crews that deliver the best performance will stand against each other at the end of the round. Each performance is allocated ten minutes.

As with boxers in the fighting ring, the crews sit or stand on opposite sides of the competition space. The music starts and the final battle commences. A member or two from one crew enter the arena, approach the members of the opposing crew, dance in front of them, and challenge them to a duel. They maintain their ordinary dance routines but these are now embellished with gestures that appear to be insults and obscenities. They point towards their rear or groin with a wiping gesture and then throw their hands in the faces of the opponents. The lyric is about "scrubbing a pussy" ("pussy" is the colloquial word for women's genitals).

The battle seems not only to single out the best dancer, but to mark territory as well. At one stage, two dancers from opposing sides become entangled because neither is prepared to give the spot to the other. Gavin intervenes and one of the dancers is forced to retreat. The audience has awakened from its apathy and is now choosing sides and providing support to their favourites. The dancer is one of the more prominent symbols of hip-hop. Due to the high dramatic content of his performance the dancer communicates more effectively than the singer. Most members of the audience are not able to perform many of the movements themselves, though being mesmerised by the dancing becomes a way of sharing the dancer's physical (e)motions without needing to dance themselves.

The dancers continue, oblivious to the crowd. After all, they have urgent matters to settle inside the arena. Their entire bearing and attitude seems transformed. They are warriors and there's a battle to be fought and won. From the dj's booth the music plays unceasingly and the spirit of the music seems to complement the tensions on the floor. Dancers enter and leave the arena, occupying it temporarily. Legs spin, bodies spin, the music throbs. As far as Gavin's counsel is concerned, there is no shortage of style and rhythm.

This is how the competition proceeds until the winning crew is chosen. All the crews have performed confidently, and I imagine that the judges must have had a difficult time choosing the winner. What I find striking in these performances is how dance articulates, through physical motions, feelings of domination and subordination. The dance arena seems to be the place where relations of power are most vividly portrayed.

Dance constitutes a major part of hip-hop performance and analysing production and consumption of dance calls attention to a number of considerations. First, one has to look at the relationship between the dancer and the audience, which is variable. B-boys perform either for an audience as entertainers, or for fellow b-boys. There are two types of audiences. One that comes to see the spectacle of break-dancing in concerts and competitions and the other to learn, as at hip-hop workshops. However, the two types of audiences may overlap.

Second, how is the dance propagated and how does it affirm the b-boy's credibility as a hip-hop member? In the fourth chapter, I discussed how informants explain that in order to be a true hip-hopper, one has to acquire mastery over all aspects of the movement. Competence in dance therefore signals that one is on the way to becoming a true hip-hopper. Break-dancing is difficult to master and requires a great deal of practice. Movements are robotic, dazzling, dangerous. Dancing is propagated through visual and physical participation, and repetition. B-boys exchange signatures and they use the competitions and demonstrations to learn from each other.

Maintaining traditional movements is a way of preserving the dance while their signatures and improvisations add to the spontaneity of the performance. As performers continually or spontaneously create nuances and embellishments, the dance is constantly reformulated.

Even when dancing within set sequences, slight changes occur that eventually develop and shape the dance as a whole. In break-dancing, change is a significant part of tradition; it is a constant as well (Daniel 1995:138).

Third, through dance, the b-boy may seek to work through problems therapeutically or merely display dance skills. Emile explained the importance of dance as an outlet for the frustrations experienced during the apartheid years. As long as conditions remain hostile, youths will always seek an outlet. For hip-hoppers, break-dancing provides one such escape:

*Raoul : With dancing again, if you're there you can feel the energy...you can see that guy putting something into it, it's not a thing that you can just see one or two seconds and then just do it. There's a whole emotional side to it, it's not just some people coming together and doing a couple of dance forms and that... (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

Break-dancing is more often mediated through competition with others. The competition described above explains how dances may be viewed as confrontational. In these confrontations, messages are sent across the arena of the competition indicating the intention to intimidate the opponent. If one side does not yield then the next step is an encounter. "Idioms of confrontation" are present in any culture (Spencer 1985:23). In the case of hip-hop dance is a highly appropriate idiom because it can "display precisely the power, initiative, and coordinated discipline that gives strength in the event of an encounter" (ibid). Pewa observes that competitiveness among Zulu speakers is the medium through which brotherhood among members of a soccer team or choir is realised (1995). Furthermore, the collective action of singing and dancing among rival groups strengthens inter-groups relations. Another example of the relationship between competition and dancing is displayed among the Maring of New Guinea, where border disputes often lead to mass dancing which is regarded equivalent to fighting (Spencer 1985:23). Similarly, hip-hop competitions bring and keep the community together. The kind of battle waged during the competition provides a safe alternative to direct confrontation with those who wield political and economic power.

Break-dancing is a metaphor for man the hunter, battling to survive in the concrete jungle. The accolades b-boys receive are a confirmation of their status as men, and as ordained hip-hoppers. At the same time they constantly have to participate in order not to lose their status. Having to affirm your membership to the movement is subject to continuous participation and evaluation. Dance therefore provides a substitute for the assertion and negotiation of manhood in society at large. The confrontational bearing maintained by the dancers symbolises the power of the male body, and of how masculinity seeps in from external social structures into performance.

The fourth question is whether participation is required, expected or voluntary. What is meant by participation? In a dialogical context audiences participate by shouting their approval, cheering, and gesticulating. In the actual dance, however, audiences are excluded for b-boying is both difficult and dangerous. With the exception of one demonstration I attended where audience members were invited to attempt a few basic movements, the audience is usually excluded from participation. This means that b-boying is exclusive; it is only accessible to those who are active within the movement.

Last, what does break-dancing reveal about the relationship between hip-hop in Cape Town and hip-hop in other parts of the world? Hip-hop performance is a confluence of strategies in which Erlmann's (1996:12) notion about globally connected performance practices and Bhabha's (1994:51) praxis of split identities are enacted. In his performance the b-boy stages his role as a person who is connected directly to others in his immediate location and symbolically with hip-hop throughout the world. The relationship between the local and the global is defined largely by membership to the Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation. By implication this suggests conformity and consensus. However, this exchange is simultaneously one of collusion, where hip-hoppers use performance to enact translocal tensions that can only be addressed on the local stage. The outside begins its presencing on the local stage.

In its local mediation, the image of the performing body as a point of identification marks the site of an ambivalence for its representation is spatially split. It draws attention to what is visible and to that which is not visible. The performer's presence on the local stage is part of

the performance reality. On the other hand the performer's presence is the key to understanding the imaginative construct of the Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation. The performance is therefore a representation of a time that is always elsewhere and, as product, the performance becomes a repetition of something, whether performance or rehearsal, that has transpired before. Through their style and behaviour Cape Town's hip-hoppers show that they are constantly in dialogue with their counterparts in other parts of the world. Performance gives shape to this dialogue.<sup>46</sup> In hip-hop, then, the performing body must be seen as the body linked with the construction of the urbanised, localised and globalised self. The context of the body is not social only, but more specifically, social in the context of the township, and the rest of the world. The local performing body is the site from which we are able to read the relativity of global processes.

### 3. Gesture and dialogue

*Raoul : When you're on stage don't think you're God and you can go diss your spectators. So if you say fuck you to me when I'm in the crowd, then fuck you too. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

Dialogue, whether verbal or non-verbal, is an indispensable tool for heightening, negotiating and transforming social awareness. When a performance is objectified and lifted from its interactional setting it is open for scrutiny by an audience (Bauman and Briggs 1990:73). Thus performance heightens awareness of the act of communicating and allows the audience to evaluate the skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment. In this section I describe how the dialogue between performer and audience is structured by gesture, and specifically in the simple and apparently innocuous act of gazing.

At one of the demonstrations I attended there was not much distance between the performers and the audience. Within this particular context, both were engaged in an intense dialogical relationship. The intensity was enhanced by the proximity of performer and audience. At one stage the performers had to force the audience out of the arena. Below is a

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<sup>46</sup> See Fabian (1990), Keil and Feld (1994:84). Keil and Feld write about perceptual sensations being transformed into conceptual realities.

description of the demonstration held by Black Noise at a fundraising event hosted by a primary school in Mandalay. Mandalay used to be a middle class coloured area, increasingly more and more black people are residing there. This area is on the border of the Cape Flats and squeezed in between Mitchell's Plain and Khayelitsha:

The group is togged out in their designer sportswear and soon after arrival they commence with warm-up exercises. A linoleum carpet is rolled out on the cement floor and the surface of the carpet is sprayed with furniture polish. A large group of children and their parents gather around the carpet. They are cautioned to move further away as some of the movements require large enough space. Some form of dance music is playing on the public address system. The leader introduces the group and as each member goes to demonstrate a certain action, he, and the other members of the group, take turns in explaining the moves or actions.

Each member goes to the carpet two or three times to demonstrate some of the movements. They concentrate on foot patterns, first the basic, then the more intricate. The audience seems spellbound by the speed and dexterity with which the members of the group execute their movements. Every dance solo seems to end in some comic gesture and this elicits encouragement and cheering from the audience. The dancers receive extra attention from the young women who seem to have more interest in them as eligible young men than able dancers.

From the footwork demonstrations they proceed to do headspins, backspins and turtle-crawls. The latter entails supporting the whole body on one hand, or alternatively, both hands, in a horizontal position. The arms are positioned at right angles with the elbows at ninety degrees. No other body part is in contact with the carpet. In this position the dancer rotates, slowly at first, and then with an alarming speed. He rotates until he comes to an abrupt halt.

Towards the end two members demonstrate the "wave". This movement requires rigid articulation from the hand, wrist, elbow and shoulder of the right arm, moving in sequence; through the neck, into the left arm, elbow, wrist and hand. This movement flows into the



partner who mimics the action with the same articulations. Two members of the audience are called to the dance-floor and asked to mimic the dancers. In spite of their eagerness they are not very successful and there is some laughter from the audience and the two novices. "*Gaan huis toe en practice in die spiegel*" (go home and practice in the mirror), reprimands one of the crew members.

At this workshop the audience was not encouraged or expected to physically participate in the demonstration as the movements are far too complicated and require hours of slow and meticulous practice. However, the response by the audience was enthusiastic, and communication was fast and participatory. The only shortcoming of the demonstration, I feel, is that the entire group did not perform in unison. (November 1997)

As in any conversation, the dialogue between the participants in a musical performance is inextricably bound to the inclusion of gestural behaviour. How do these gestures affect or enhance communication during performances? In the preceding descriptions it can be observed that gestures not only invite or provoke a new gesture, but are rather created in anticipation of a response. As the one feeds off the other, communication can be deemed to be a cyclical flow of information. Each gesture is doubly orientated as it looks back to the gesture it is answering and forward to the anticipated gesture it will partly determine in advance. Gestures, like words, "are thus borderzones between self and other, and moments in the open-ended historical continuity of past and future" (Morris 1994:13). In this manner the dialogical flow is structured and maintained.

In a performance the observer is an active part of the communication process and not merely the passive recipient of musical messages. In the competition the audience's reaction to the open mic session shows how the act of gazing can convey messages as well. This is a form of appraisal, and the success of the open mic session is open to debate. Singers expressed themselves without obvious restraint, their utterances and behaviour on the stage can be read as successful, regardless of physical participation by the audience. In this context the encounter between observer and performer involves engagement and making sense of a performance through interpretive gestures that are linked to the structure of contiguous

sound events (Wiley [1975] (1994). Both the audience and performer therefore determine the flows and ruptures of an event.

In his reading of Goffman's work on face to face interaction Kendon determines that agents do not constantly have to monitor each other because each agent's actions are construed by the other as a line of action (1988:22). Hence whenever people share the same space they are inevitably sources of information for each other. In a workshop I attended at Pollsmoor prison, where inmates were invited to sing, the inmates did not face the audience when they performed. Their eyes were focussed on the side of the performance area, away from the audience, yet their performance was well received. The audience, other inmates, enjoyed the performance tremendously. In this case the cause of such enjoyment may be the fact that they shared the same living space as well. Communication is assisted, in this case, by the knowledge they have of one other. In the competition and the prison workshop, communication is displayed as a process of dialogue whereby both the gaze and the absence thereof are rendered meaningful.

In performance, communication is profoundly dialogical. The behaviour of the dancers influences how audience members perceive and evaluate them as crews. Generally, musicians and dancers who move their bodies in time with the music, clap and maintain eye contact with the audience, are interacting with their audiences. In reality, eye contact between performer and audience merely provides the illusion of intimacy. In this situation it is not enough for the b-boy to be an agent only, the b-boy has to be seen to demonstrate agency to others (Giddens 1988:262). Communication is veiled since audience participation is secondary to the immediate need of b-boys. B-boys show that they are aware of the audience, but they do not make the audience the object of any curiosity. B-boys are under pressure to "get it right", audience participation helps, but is not crucial. In performances of breaking, eye contact may not be desired for all the attention is on trying to execute the physical movements successfully:

*LW: You mentioned earlier that b-boying is your favourite part of hip-hop. How do you feel when you are on the stage dancing?*

*Emile: With breaking you try not to panic. It's like running a hundred meters. You take a deep breath and dive into it. So you try to stay focussed on what you're going to do and when you panic you can injure yourself. On the stage, when something does go wrong you tend to move around in such a way that people don't really know that you've made a mistake. (Interview : November 1997. Fish Hoek)*

The intensity of the performance helps to convince the audience that they are indeed part of the performance. In non-verbal communication another factor is the dancers' level of confidence that is derived experientially. With repeated performance dancers re-create an emotion through remembering earlier situations in which it was experienced. They re-frame the emotion experienced earlier and express it symbolically. Performance may therefore induce emotion that is heightened in the passage from the past to the present and by the history and experience of its actors. Thus as communicative contexts performances are neither static nor dictated to by the social and physical environment. Rather, as processes they emerge in the ongoing negotiations between participants in social interactions. Through experience and rehearsals performers gradually internalise the nonverbal dimensions of giving a convincing performance (Groce and Lynxwiler 1994:116). These sets of rules are transmitted from one performance to another:

*Shabeen : The people I work with...I respect them a hell of a lot because...we don't practice at all really...even if we go overseas. 'Cause once we're on stage we somehow click and that's it, so some people think it's a polished show or a prepared show, you know with certain vibes that just looks like it comes alive on the spur of the moment and it actually does, so I respect everybody I work with and it's great working with them. (Interview : November 1997. Woodstock)*

## Section C

### Texture and performance

Close examination of elements in hip-hop performances reveal that they are textural and agent-driven.<sup>47</sup> The term "texture" is often applied when elements of musical style are

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<sup>47</sup> Shepherd believes that sound can reach, touch or move us only through its texture or grain (1986:314).

discussed. Many music styles represent layered voices that are organised in and around each other; they are independent yet simultaneously part of a single event. Rap music too has layers of sound. In producing a song rappers write the lyrics first. From here they proceed to the sampler where they are able to concoct samples and grooves. Each step of the way is marked by the layering of a particular sound or feeling. Each part is independent, yet each part attains importance only in relation to the others.

Texture may be a sensation that is visual as well. For instance, in spraypainting, layers of colours are painted over one another. The result is a piece where layers of colours blend and stand apart. The dialogue between colours is enhanced by the juxtaposition of differences. In parts of the dissertation I discuss aspects of rap's aesthetics; now, I want to move beyond Rose's description of rap aesthetics as "flow, layering and rupture in line" (1994a:21) by suggesting that hip-hop style is, more definitively, about the blending and juxtaposition of differences. In refuting how colours are to be conventionally organised hip-hoppers contribute to the oppositional character of hip-hop. I would venture further and claim that this aesthetic is typically African. Aspects of the movement, such as the music and the spray-painting, seem to share the same aesthetics.

In the performance itself, various elements assist in clarifying the meaning of texture. It cannot be assumed that texture is merely an innate feature of the event. Rather, on close inspection it can be observed that on the stage, texture is derived from the spaces performers inhabit or not. Performers are ultimately responsible for how the sound is to be produced and consumed. In musical performance the hierarchical way in which performers position themselves on the stage structures the tension in the music; tension between parts being an essential ingredient of texture. On the stage there are lead singers and chorus singers, lead instrumentalists and supporting instrumentalists. In rap music and b-boying however, this dialectic is not as prominent since the tension revolves more around maintaining the flow. Hip-hop performances differ from the performance of other kinds of popular music in that there are no lead instrumentalists or lead singers.<sup>48</sup> Most of the rappers

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<sup>48</sup> I use the term "instrumentalist" in its new application. That is, to regard equipment such as the turntable and drum machine used during production and performances as musical instruments.

will sing a verse or a chorus from the same song only, so no single performer dominates. Adding to the texture, usually in his corner, is the dj spinning his sounds.

Sometimes the exchange among performers takes place within the same song and at other times different performers will sing different songs within the same show. Performance hierarchy in rap music is therefore not as sharply defined as performances in many other forms of music making. Obviously all the performers are not equally skilled and, as in other popular music performances including jazz, they generally share in the responsibility of sustaining the spontaneity of the performance. Those not singing are often b-boying.

In performance there is a physical space between the performers and this space can be compared to the intervals between musical notes or to the space between rhythmic lines. As performers move about they resemble the physical push and pull between the rhythmic and timbral layers in music. The gestures and signals among the performers become somatic inflections that enhance the visual and musical texture.

During performances both performers and audiences are active in the shaping of the musical texture. An audience will react and interpret through somatic involvement those effects that are more prominent. In giving preference to certain actions it may choose to reinforce or erode this hierarchy. The way in which an audience consumes the sound therefore connotes a response to an intrinsic quality of its performance, that of its texture. In as much as performance space provides the possibility for agency and the relativity of social processes, I argue that these processes are textural. Hence in this chapter I have explored performance as a discursive space in which textural possibilities are manifested, mediated, and negotiated. The performance arena is a space where patterns of domination and subordination interface, thereby creating physical orientations that resemble the textural properties of the music itself. Imagine texture in hip-hop as an experience that is continually refigured, negotiated, staged, lived. Imagine too, that this experience transpires in a space separated by the railway line from the outside. Once again the image of circularity and the experience of marginality serve to structure and position hip-hop bodies at the same time as they are structured and positioned by collective and socially mediated actions during performance.

## Chapter 7

### Somebody screeaamm!

My theoretical framing of this dissertation has evolved from the discourses by Barthes (1986), Bhabha (1995), and Fabian (1990). I have analysed the performance of rap and break-dancing as a space within a space (hip-hop), within a space (Cape Town); the particular focus being on the dialogue between performance and place. Barthes recognises that all individuals have the capacity to bring about significant change and meaning to their lives (poetics). In hip-hop this process of transformation is enacted through performance (Fabian). By focussing on themes of hope, strength and survival in performances, hip-hoppers move away from feeling dis-empowered. Feelings of marginalisation and alienation are re-figured into behaviour that is positive.

Following the trope of the circular railway line, I have emphasised that the process of creating boundaries and mediating identities is repetitive and cyclical. In the course of the repetition differences are mediated and scrutinised. Hip-hop is a cultural space in which differences are signified. Difference imputes hip-hop with richness and is used to punctuate and ritualise hip-hop performances; difference optimises the ability to empower while raising the consciousness of the hip-hop community. In this context, Bhabha's notion of antagonistic and competing identities frames the nuances within post-apartheid identities.

Hip-hop occupies a marginal space in Cape Town that is transient and exclusive. The physical space hip-hoppers inhabit is paradoxically separated from a larger space by the railway line, the domain of hegemonic power, and included within another, the metaphoric domain. The metaphoric space they inhabit is discursive and contested. In performance, space is subjected to further manipulations. Thus hip-hop in Cape Town is uniquely structured by specific interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence. However, to compound matters, they are contested and uneven.

Below informers express their opinions of the state of hip-hop at present. I view these responses relationally. First, as a response to changing social conditions:

*LW: How does hip-hop today compare with when it started out in the 1980s?*

*Deon: There's a tremendous process of change, mentally you know. We have done so much research on history. There's so much research that hip-hop allows you to do and it provides you with so much information. It's quite obviously going to grow in a certain sense, and it also depends on what you listen to, and if you're going to listen to a lot of bullshit your head is going to be infested with crap. So we look at the overall view and perspective of the music and we tend to feed on most of the positive stuff because that's where the impact lies, and that's what the culture does for people. We are coming through lyrics with negative connotations but there's a positive angle to the songs today. That's in something like Mashootyou, with "I take up my nine, shoot you in your spine, hit you on the head, make sure you're dead, by the end of the day, I go to prison". (Interview : October 1997. Cape Town).*

*Emile: I remember the review of that show where the reporters questioned, "was it (hip-hop) just another one-off?" And unfortunately, five years later it has proven to be just that. (Interview : November 1997. Fish Hoek)*

Compare the view above with Emile's optimism two years later:

*There are a lot more crews. There's this one...coming out with an album...what's their name? There are also these girls...POC's got a new album coming out, BVK is releasing their new album in April next year. We're trying to get money from the national government to go on national tour. We already have money from the regional government. (Telephonic conversation : November 1999)*

Second, as in the relationship among various crews:

*Ice: There's so little resources you can tap into that actually accept this as a culture and want to invest in it...and these guys that are supposed to be on the top like POC and Black Noise, Cool Funk Productions; you've got to kick their butt at the end of the day to get anywhere that's why GDP is underground... basically because of... they do something behind our backs and we don't find out about it...and step on you because*

*you're smaller than them. I'm not saying GDP is smaller than them. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

*Raoul: We're not underground we're under water. Everybody wants to be underground...but we as GDP, we've got totally different ideas from the rest about hip-hop...we do our own thing, we made a cassette, I can press a cd now if I want to. We have the facilities but they've got all this about walking into a nightclub. They're shit...now you must walk up to them and say "you're the greatest". There's laities there that can take POC out in a second, and Black Noise. We used to play rap to those in Cool Funk and they used to say that is shit. They want their club music and now they're doing rap. (Interview : October 1997. Mitchell's Plain)*

This is how Gavin qualifies the position of Black Noise:

*Black Noise have been struggling for a very long time and there's a lot of people especially in the hip-hop community that don't appreciate us or don't respect us for what we are doing. It's just "ja, you're a sell-out group", because of the type of music that we do as well. We don't sound too hardcore or for us it's not just about standing on stage. (Conversation : November 1997)*

Hip-hop is a cultural space in the margin, a source of disorder, inequity, and, paradoxically, one of cohesion. In hip-hop fixing space and boundaries are used as strategies for the assertion of power. This is a political process and does not occur in a straight-forward way. In the dissertation I described hip-hop performance as a space that is appropriated for the mediation, assertion, and negotiation of power. In the hip-hop community power is figured in the identities hip-hoppers construct for themselves. In post-apartheid South Africa people feel compelled to constantly question, define, invent, and re-invent their identities. Hip-hoppers share in this experience.

Despite the negative spillover from hip-hop in the USA, where the white-owned media has focussed on the self-annihilation of a number of African American hip-hoppers, hip-hop is fast becoming more popular in the townships of Cape Town. There are many new crews that are actively recruiting and performing in the community. More crews are being published through independent labels. Women (albeit not many) are beginning to participate in open



mic sessions. I suspect that this increase in hip-hop activity is probably due to the increasing publicity in Cape Town's media about the east- and west-coast schism among rappers in the USA. For instance, many youths in the Cape Flats have appropriated the east coast and west coast hand signals. They wear t-shirts that honour the murdered American gangsta-rapper, Tupac Shakur.

Due to the violence on the Cape Flats, hip-hoppers discourage the association with gangsta-rap. Hip-hoppers regard it as an American problem on the one hand; on the other hand this behaviour inflames the already violent predisposition among youths on the Cape Flats. Another reason for the growing interest is that hip-hop offers an alternative to the violence and chaos in the townships. In keeping with the UHHZN's tenets members in Cape Town oppose acts of violence.

For hip-hoppers in Cape Town being poor and powerless constitute their main source of motivation. An interesting development in Cape Town's hip-hop scene are the tensions within the movement that are engendered by the relationship that exists between the movement and the mainstream, and the resentment felt by lesser known crews towards the more popular crews. As far as strategy is concerned hip-hoppers are divided. Where is the "unity" in the Universal Zulu Hip-Hop Nation? "Colouredness" and "blackness" are sources of strength that unite and divide. The fact is that these different opinions and their contingent strategies are not articulated publicly. The tension among hip-hoppers is articulated within the hip-hop community and within the performance space. The second area of conflict is one in which GDP members feel betrayed by the crews that are more prominent because the latter are perceived to have greater access to the music industry. In addition, they appear to be financially stable. Some of this anger seems to stem from personal experiences, while some of it seems to be the inability of GDP to sustain creative energy. In these ambiguities one can discern different layers of tensions and indeed, these layers are a metaphor for hip-hop and rap music aesthetics.

There are a number of ambivalences in hip-hop. First, hip-hoppers emphasise non-sexism and their willingness to share the stage with women. They acknowledge the advances made by women in South Africa. However, during fieldwork I realised that women do not

participate in the productive processes of hip-hop. Below, Deon motivates a reason for this behaviour:

*You know especially growing up in a western society...it teaches you that the man is the provider. He is much stronger and all this bullshit...so I think in the female subconscious that holds for the majority of females. Then you get the strong women that comes around and says, to hell with this...you know...if you're a man I'm able to get into your territory and still do damage in your scene...and that's the attitude that we like to encourage. We want to tell them if you have a problem with whoever tell them this is a lot of bullshit...and come with better skills and show them a thing or two. I'm not threatened by women participating. I think with females participating it will get the culture motivated much more. (Interview : October 1997. Cape Town)*

Second, hip-hoppers have always protested and challenged forms of inequity. From the days of apartheid to the present, the radicalism remains intact, but the focus shifts as the enemy is defined with the times. In apartheid South Africa, hip-hoppers used their music to mobilise and inform the oppressed majority. Now rappers who proclaim black consciousness face a double bind as they simultaneously affirm the progress made by the black majority government, while local conditions in the townships resulting from ineffective governance remains a burning issue. Third, in economic terms, hip-hoppers tend to condemn the negative effects of capitalism:

*Deon: Ja...you see the trouble with the mainstream is that it's all about capital. There's a lot of companies that sponsor certain programmes...so they might feel that the whole hip-hop thing does not fit into their product or whatever... so they have...hip-hop teaches you to be an independent person. Once you rise to a knowledge of self and you have a degree of knowledge automatically you know... that whatever chemicals they put into a Coke is bullshit and you don't want to be associated with that...or blah blah whatever, you know...or maybe they'll realise that Nike is a whole lot of shit because umm... how can a person... 'cos they got cheap labour going in the Far East and stuff like that. That's not good for the mainstream...so that's why there is a whole conspiracy and war going against this movement...because the essence of the hip-hop culture is to uplift the people because it started out in gang infested areas and poverty areas...took people out of the ghetto...if you lived in the ghetto...physically, mentally and spiritually it took you out of the whole ghetto situation. It's not good for the mainstream...because the mainstream...I mean...like the industry,*

*especially the record industry...or just capitalistic industry overall man...they bank on people's ignorance. Hip-hop makes you aware of all the bullshit going on around you. (Interview : October 1997. Cape Town)*

In order to generate and sustain a living hip-hoppers do cross over. In the USA a rapper such as Mary J Blige has softened her style with the infusion of rhythm and blues lyrics and sappy tunes. In addition, mainstream industries have imitated hip-hop style so well that hip-hoppers sometimes participate in promoting the consumption of certain brands.

The ingredients of hip-hop and specifically rap, are found in all spheres of contemporary life: in oversized clothing, in advertisements on television and radio in South Africa, and in the use of ebionics by rave disc jockeys and promoters. The mainstream has appropriated from hip-hop that which it finds most desirable and marketable. Hip-hop has been transformed into a visceral and intensely commercialised expression. Media moguls and the corporate world are using hip-hop elements to intensify their hold on the consumer with the result that hip-hop has a distinct commercial appeal. In the category called "world music" traditional music from different parts of the world has been appropriated by the corporate world and synthesised with elements of popular music for general consumption. Rap music is following the same trend. In the west, certainly, hip-hop has come a long way from its previous status as a marginalised culture.

The latter experience might represent a sell-out, a softening of rap's strength as a medium for bringing about fundamental social change. In the context of Cape Town's hip-hop though transforming rap's character signals a degree of maturity engendered by changing political situations as well as the need for generating an income. As much as hip-hop is about the enclave, or the crew, it is also concerned with pushing ideological boundaries beyond the crew. Participation in mainstream activities indicates that hip-hop has now crossed one of these boundaries. Having gone through a process of "education" and feeling "positive" about themselves, hip-hoppers feel confident enough to participate within the mainstream.

Despite closer contact with the mainstream, most hip-hoppers in Cape Town are trying to hold onto the idea that they can retain the authenticity of the genre. Black Noise interpret

authenticity as an aesthetic in which their music articulates the style, intonation, and struggles of the local hip-hop community. These hip-hoppers are reluctant to sell-out:

I'm going kinda crazy, hip-hoppers nowadays are so damned lazy  
Posturing, wannabees, sound like you come from America  
Nobody wanting to represent Azania<sup>49</sup>  
Tell me what the hell is happening here  
Oh no, never will you support the local  
Americanise the vocal, but you're a local too  
So what you're gonna do  
When no-one buys from you...

Am I getting through, what the hell is real  
Is it real to have an accent not from here...hell no  
Is it real to spend money on those who abuse you...hell no  
Because we can have our own hip-hop community  
If you show some unity...  
(Black Noise : "Awhoowha" : Hip-hop won't stop)

By proposing and re-inforcing an alternative social structure hip-hoppers endeavour to keep hip-hop as "real" as possible. The prospects for such a position are not strong since many hip-hoppers are full-time artists and need to live. They also feel the need to move beyond hip-hop, to pursue careers in related fields, hence Shaheen's resignation from POC in 1999. Regardless, whatever road they choose, I believe hip-hoppers will always think and behave positively.

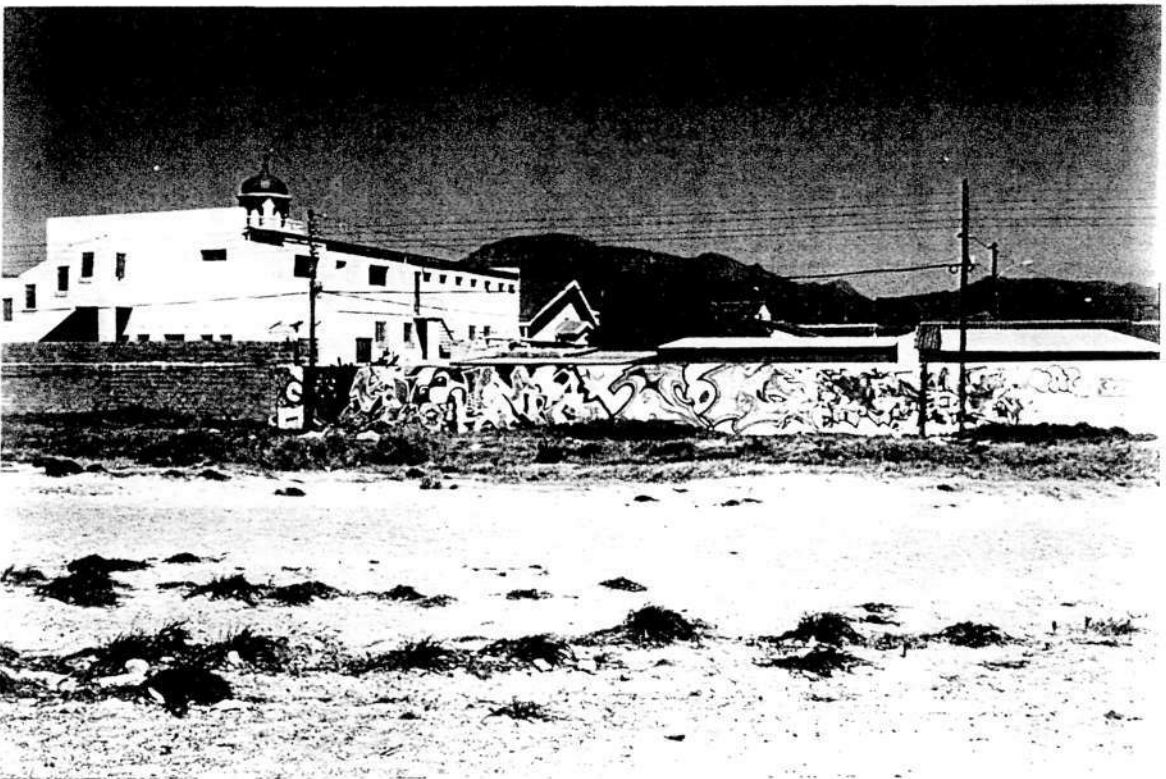
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<sup>49</sup> In ancient times Arab traders referred to the south-eastern part of Africa as Azania. During apartheid many liberation organisations proposed the name Azania as an alternative to the name South Africa.



Above: Mobile turf, a train in Cape Town

Below: A spray-painting near my home





Above: Max, in the center, and friends painting a wall in Gugulethu

Below: Josie and inmates of Pollsmoor prison





Above: Angelo conducting a turn-tabling workshop in Pollsmoor prison

Below: Turn-tabling at a concert





Left: Shaheer's recording studio at his home

below: Emile conducting a breaking workshop on the Cape Flats







Gwen batting in  
Lang.

Below: Young children breaking at a competition in Mitchell's Plain





Below and above: Breakdancing competition in Mitchell's Plain



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