

★ TUNIS

**Afrikan Hiphop Caravan Special Edition**

**The Journal of Hip Hop Studies**

**JHHS**

★ Est. 2012 SALAAM

*Volume 1 Issue 2 ISSN 2331-5563*

★ CAPE TOWN



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## Foreword

**Katja Kellerer, PhD student, Humboldt University of Berlin and Organising Team, Afrikan Hiphop Caravan**

The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan is an annual project run by various Hip Hop activist networks spread across the African continent and the diaspora. Its vision is to build a strong and united Hip Hop movement – a cohesive network of African Hip Hop collectives, with strong ties to like-minded organisations worldwide, that define Hip Hop as a tool of cultural resistance and political emancipation. The African Hiphop Caravan took place for the first time from February to April 2013. In collaboration with numerous project partners, the key organising collectives of that year – Soundz of the South (South Africa), Uhuru Network (Zimbabwe) and Wasanii Mtaani (Kenya) – investigated, discussed and celebrated Hip Hop, street art and urban youth culture for a week in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Harare, Nairobi and Tunis, respectively.

This volume is comprised of selected papers that were presented by Hip Hop practitioners, activists and scholars at one, or more, of the four Hiphop Symposia that were organised during the project's first operational year: the Hiphop Symposium in Cape Town, which took place on February 13 at Community House; the second one, at the Goethe Institute in Johannesburg, which followed on February 20; the third one, in Harare, which was organized in collaboration with the Department for African Languages and Literatures at the University of Zimbabwe on February 27; and the fourth one, which concluded the series, on April 17 at the Goethe Institute in Nairobi.

The Hiphop Conferences, which are comprised of paper presentations, panels and roundtables, form, next to Hiphop Slams in working-class communities, the cornerstone of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan. The need for creating a unique space for scholars and activists to discuss the manifold and diverse adaptations of Hip Hop culture on the African continent rests upon two interrelated realizations. While African Hip Hop is increasingly attracting the attention of scholars – as testified by recent publications such as *Native Tongues: An African Hiphop Reader* (2011) and *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* (2012), academics rarely have the opportunity to openly dialogue with Hip Hop activists. This multi-tiered dialogue, however, is important for Hip Hop to stay relevant, reflected and engaged in community struggles.

Since its arrival in the 1980s, elements of Hip Hop culture, particularly rap, have been adopted and adapted in diverse forms. Despite the fact that Hip Hop has been used as a tool for mobilising toward social transformation and to contest authority, oppression and power, as, for instance, during the presidential elections in Senegal in the early 2000s, elements of the culture, particularly rap, have also been appropriated by the ruling elite (see, for instance, Kellerer this volume) and underwent commodification, or, in other words, were adopted into mainstream pop culture in many places. Thus, the key aim of the Conference is to create a platform for Hip Hop scholars, cultural activists, artists and community organisers to critically analyse current debates surrounding African Hip Hop, to deepen the understanding of Africa's urban youth cultures, and to share

strategies and experiences in mobilising young people for social justice and transformation.

The Hip Hop Symposia in 2013, which were entitled “The Afrikan Hip Hop Symposium: An Educational Exploration of Youth Culture,” allowed for a wide range of topics to be discussed, including the impact of Hip Hop on urban youth culture and identity formation, the connection, or transcultural flows, between African and global Hip Hop culture, and the dichotomy between “mainstream” and “underground” Hip Hop in Africa. In addition to addressing, and speaking to, specific aspects of this wide thematic areas, the selected papers in this volume, which all have been presented at one or more of the four Hip Hop Symposia, are reflective of the Conference’s inclusive format by varying in style and form. Three of the submissions are written by young, female scholars: Pauline Mateveke analyses the songs of Stunner, Zimbabwe’s “king of bling,” Lauren Kent offers a case study of a breakdance crew based in Grahamstown, South Africa, while Katja Kellerer explores the mainstream/underground split in Zimbabwe’s Hip Hop scene. Thus, their articles – the latter two being shortened versions of a B.A. and a M.A. thesis, respectively – are scholarly excursions into the terrain of Hip Hop culture. The remaining four articles are written by Hip Hop activists, each of which reflects a different style and form. Biko Mutsaurwa outlines the mission and vision of the Afrikan Hip Hop Caravan. Mic Crenshaw, on the other side, shares his personal experiences and reflections of participating in the project’s event in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Harare and of travelling with the comrades. Shingirayi Sabeta, aka Mau Mau, who counts as one of the pioneers of Zimbabwean Hip Hop, offers an insider’s view of the beginnings and state of the urban youth culture in his home country, while Buddha Blaze’s comments capture his understanding of and involvement in Nairobi’s Hip Hop scene.

## Message to Our Brothers and Sisters in Hip Hop: Africa!

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Jambo!

Sawubonani, omfuwethu naodadewethu,

Mon freres et mon soeurs d'Afrique!

Children of Africa!

I, from the land of our diaspora, greet you all, and wish you all success on your struggle to join hands and hearts with your brothers and sisters in Black America. Please know that our true lives are rarely seen on the West's media; our lives are brutish and short in America, and millions of us live at the bottom of the well. Hear us, and know that our struggles are more similar than you know. The media is but another weapon of war against our communities, wherever they are in the world.

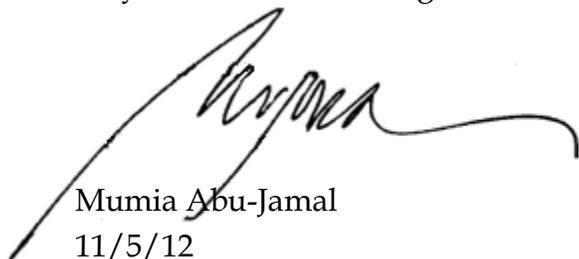
Several days ago, I read an interesting article citing the words of a great Black American scholar and leader, Dr. Vincent Harding, a man who worked with and assisted the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and helped write the last great speech of his life, not at the Washington monument, but in New York's historic Riverside Church--a year to the day when he was assassinated. Dr. Harding, on his 81st birthday, cited a West African poet's hope for tomorrow, and I hope his words reach you, who are, after all, mostly poets also. Dr. Harding said the poet said, "I am a citizen of a country that does not yet exist." I'm sure you can all hear this message, and feel the vibe that we all need to create the country, the world, that does not now exist; but which we must struggle to bring into being. That is part of our work, isn't it?

Let your rhythms and flows send energy into that creation.

I thank you,

Merci, mes amies

May the Ancestors strengthen us in this struggle,



Mumia Abu-Jamal  
11/5/12

## An Introspection: Get the Caravan Moving

Mic Crenshaw

Mic Crenshaw is a Chicago-born poet, emcee and cultural activist. In addition to being the lead organizer of the Afrikan Hip-hop Caravan in the United States, he is part of and involved in various organisations and projects, including the Hip Hop Congress, the U.S. Social Forum National Planning Committee and International Committee, Education WithOut Borders, as well as the non-profit community radio station KBOO. He is also the founder of Global Fam, a non-governmental organisation, which has blossomed into a production, promotion, artist management and education company providing mainstream entertainment that supports social justice activism. Together with DJ Klavical, Mic participated in the Afrikan Hip-hop Caravan 2013 and travelled from Cape Town to Harare. The following article is a reflection about cultural activism and his role and involvement in the Afrikan Hip-hop Caravan, in particular the experiences he collected along the road, travelling with the comrades.

Activism brought me to Africa for the first time in 2004. I went to a conference in Rwanda. I forged an alliance with African activists on the ground in Zimbabwe and Burundi specifically. We helped set up a computer center in Burundi through a network of activists there and donated computers and raised funds from the U.S. We used Hip Hop, specifically a show with Dead Prez, to raise the funds to ship the donated computers. The computer center is up and running successfully. Over 600 people have been trained in skills which have helped them land jobs and elevate their educational capacity as students, educators and even semi-skilled computer repair technicians (check out more about the Computer center at [globalfam.org](http://globalfam.org)).

One comrade that I met at the Rwanda conference, Briggs Bomba, from Zimbabwe took my music back home from Rwanda with him in 2004 and introduced my sounds to local Hip Hop collectives, namely the Toyitoyi Arts Collective, which is part of the Uhuru Network, and Magamba Network based in Harare. Through sustained contact, I was able to play the *Shoko International Music Festival* in Zimbabwe in September 2012. That trip to Zimbabwe introduced me to the people who hold down Hip Hop cultural activism in Zimbabwe, at least some of the key players.

Two such individuals, Katja Kellerer and Biko Mutsaurwa, invited me to participate in the Afrikan Hip-hop Caravan (AHC) upon the condition that I contribute to the cause by helping to raise funds and support from the United States. They specifically wanted me to see if I could get The Coup and or Dead Prez to commit to headline the dates as well as get an audio recording from Mumia Abu Jamal endorsing the project.

Due to lack of major funders, The Coup and Dead Prez could not commit. Mumia was not able to record an audio address to play at the beginning of each show. However, I was able obtain a typed letter of support from Mumia Abu Jamal and raise enough funds to support DJ Klavical and myself for the first three-week leg of the tour.

The AHC tour itself was to be a six-week tour starting in Cape Town South Africa, move to Johannesburg, Harare (Zimbabwe), Nairobi (Kenya), Dakar (Senegal), and wind up in Tunis (Tunisia) for the World Social Forum. Artists would engage cultural activists, youth, students and academics as well as the general public for a week in each city in a series of events including performances and symposiums as well as media events.

DJ Klavical and I did a week in Cape Town, a week in Johannesburg and a week in Harare, before returning home to the U.S. The Caravan also visited Nairobi, Dakar and Tunis.

The Caravan was my introduction to Soundz of the South and the Toyitoyi Arts Collective, two radical Hip Hop collectives made up of artists and cultural activists from Zimbabwe and South Africa. When I say radical, I mean that they are anti-capitalists and anarchists. Cats have a root cause and critical analysis of the social conditions that exist on the continent of Africa historically and currently in their communities. Much criticism of the ruling party and their neo liberal agendas are clear as we drive by buildings named after both De Klerk and Mandela jointly.

Being from the townships in Harare, Jo' Burg, and Cape Town as were Anele, Words Of A Rebel Sistah, Khusta, Zanzolo, Biko, Kush, Thepo and Thiza, it was clear without a doubt that government barely serves the people if at all, police are deadly, and poverty and repression are far more real than the broken promises of political figures.

There were always events around people standing up for justice in the face of the ruling party's policies and police violence. The leaflets for events were on counter tops, the reports overheard in casual discussion. Marches, demonstrations, concerts. One comrade ran a pirate radio station from his flat in Soweto. While there, we witnessed one comrade hand another a coveted transmitter to more effectively broadcast over pirated frequencies.

Khayelitsha is a black Township in Cape Town. Soweto is a black township in Johannesburg. We went to both places and were able to break bread with local Hip Hop collectives that were connected to the AHC. Racial politics and history were constantly being discussed by everyone.

In one instance, after our first show in Cape Town (after flying for over twenty-four hours and dealing with fatigue, excitement and jet lag) a fellow artist attempted to engage me in a discussion about the concept of "post racial" society. It was clear that the idea of post racialism was a farce that made him angry and that I, being from the U.S., should have something to say about this. There is a parallel set of illusions and harsh realities between post-apartheid South Africa and Obama America. People are aware of the contradictions. In South Africa you can still feel the internalized apartheid that keeps people segregated despite the official end of apartheid. Both Colored and Black communities had their autonomous Hip Hop acts and organized bodies that did not always have solidarity. What solidarity there was, was a work in progress. The historical access to relative privilege coloreds have had over blacks is at the root of a lot

of resentment. The real racial oppression experienced by both adds complexities to complexion.

In the townships forced eviction of masses of landless people is common. Some forms of direct action include blocking freeways with bon fires and building dwellings on the freeway. Housing issues and landless peoples' movements are ongoing and have a long history of community organizing and direct action. The people who have nowhere to go are constantly being attacked violently and displaced by municipal governments and their authorities and thugs for hire. One of the largest and best-organized coalitions of people fighting forced eviction in the townships and settlements across South Africa is Abahlali baseMjondolo (check them out at [www.abahlali.org](http://www.abahlali.org)). DJ Klavical and I met with some of their members in informal gatherings, thanks to local activist Jared Sacks who housed us.

One of the questions that constantly ran through my mind was how did a white minority displace so many hundreds of millions of indigenous Afrikans, and sustain ownership of the vast material resources and wealth of a country, a continent? It's undeniable, palpable, psychologically devastating and emotionally draining to witness this level of white supremacy and capitalism. It sharpens a global perspective on our conditions at home. I get regular emails from Abahlali. It's true that as we speak, people are being violently displaced for trying to live, trying to breathe, to exist.

There were ten to fifteen of us as a core group of individuals collectively executing shows, radio interviews, classroom visits and Hiphop Symposia at cultural centers and schools. We rocked shows with local support in each city and regional support from surrounding cities, communities and countries. Hearing emcees and spoken word artists spit in Shona and Xhosa mixed with English is especially dope. Xhosa is an indigenous African language that sounds complex and percussive with its clicks. The clicks further intensified the marriage between the voice and the beat and added another level of depth to the songs. I am aware that there is reclamation here in this process. It is an act of revolutionary decolonization when Africans rhyme in native tongues.

The shows were dope. The opportunity to reach an audience across the ocean and on another continent from where I live was and remains essential. The cultural exchange of information, inspiration and ideas, music, dance, language, beats, rhymes, political orientation and so much more beyond words was and is profound. The results of this exchange will continue to grow and develop in predictable and unforeseen ways for years to come.

The highlight of the experiences for me was the Hiphop Symposia. The Caravan was conceived as a means to engage audiences, artists, academics and cultural activists in a discussion that assesses the role of Hip Hop in transforming consciousness and thus changing society itself. This question was explored thoroughly, but not fully enough at each symposium. This seems a contradiction and it is. This is just the beginning of a process, a part of the whole, a recent aspect of an ancient continuum. If we consider the implications of taking an artform and culture spawned by Africans in America and provide a platform for Afrikans globally to engage all humanity on the

questions directly related to our collective destiny, we have begun to grasp at the root and the potential of what the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan is. I am proud to be part of this experience.

Ultimately the vision is to develop this project to its most functional level. There needs to be ongoing touring on an autonomous and collaborative level and financial support generated through various means so that the Caravan becomes established as a global institution rooted in Afrikan Hip Hop.

## Breaking Grahamstown; Breakin' the Dance: Exploring the Role of Break Dancing in the Construction of a Break Dancer's Identity

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Lauren Kent

Lauren Kent is currently studying toward her M.A. in Urban Anthropology and Town Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her research focus is on the usage of public spaces for break dancing and capoeira training in the inner city of Johannesburg. The following article, which she presented at the Hiphop Symposia in Johannesburg, is a shortened version of an Honours research paper that she wrote in fulfillment of her B.A. degree in Anthropology at Rhodes University in 2010. In the paper, she explores the complex interplay between break dancing and identity formation processes by offering a case-study of a break-dancing crew based in Grahamstown, South Africa.

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### B-boys are in da House: The First Round

When someone becomes a B-boy, it is like being initiated into a prestigious brotherhood.<sup>1</sup> It is this space and fraternity that I began to explore – the way break dancing influences identity construction. While there has been much focus on “traditional”/ritual dances in Anthropological writing, I attempt to understand contemporary dances’ influence on a young persons’ understanding of the world. Tate (1992) agrees that being part of a crew is like belonging to a fraternity (cited in Foreman and Neal 2004: 157). Who a person chooses to be and why they choose this identity will be analysed in this paper. The identity construction will be analysed in terms of historical stereotypes, subcultural stereotypes and gender stereotypes, and storytelling through embodiment of identities. In focusing predominantly on the body as a site of pleasure, I want to further unravel the role that dancing plays, separate to political protest or social commentary. I want to propose the possibility, as Nuttall and Michael (2000) suggest, of dance and its pleasure being a form of escapism and an end unto itself.

My primary informants were the members of a break dancing crew<sup>2</sup> in Grahamstown and my research took place in 2010. In beginning my research, I attended breakdancing battles and performances and generally “hung out” with the dancers. Anthropology methodology is participant observation – we chat, we question each other, we participate in our participants’ everyday life (in this case dancing, dance battles and

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<sup>1</sup> My focus was on male dancing and male constructions of identity.

<sup>2</sup> When I refer to them as a group they will be called “the dancers,” otherwise, they will be referred to by their names.

visiting friends) and we exchange knowledge. There is little formal structured interviewing or surveys. Rather, Anthropological methodology relies on long term emersion in the lives of the participants and we often refer to our methodology as deeply hanging out. Furthering my emersion into the break dancing crew (I danced with the dancers), I began to see their 'exclusivity' as a sub-culture and the way a dancer entered into the sub-culture of a break dancing crew became important to further understanding how break dancing affects and is affected by identity construction; and these identities were multiple. I take time in the paper to consider the political implications of identity construction for these break dancers and how they are agents in their own everyday construction of identity. Their "exclusivity" also meant that it took me a long time to find them - I couldn't just open the telephone book and search "break dancers in Grahamstown." Only when they decided to 'reveal' themselves in specific places in Grahamstown did I find them. This paper is thus an exploration as much into the use of space and embodiment of identity through use of space, as it is the construction of identity based on one of the four elements of Hip Hop.

Let's break it down!

Break dancing does not stand alone but is part of a Movement called Hip Hop. The Movement is comprised of four elements: MCing<sup>3</sup> and/or rapping; DJing; street dancing and graffiti art work. Potter (1995) says that the incorrect associations of Hip Hop with gangs is because the media (which has been the driving force in spreading Hip Hop around the globe) ignores the histories of where the music, the dancing and the art work come from (p. 26). Yet there is still a strong assumption that Hip Hop is a large reason why young men engage in untoward antics on "the street" and Hip Hop/rap music is seen as the main instigator for this (Oliver 2006). To understand the history of break dancing and where it came from, one also needs to understand the history of African American youths and how break dancing has emerged out of specific socio-political environments- often in poorer areas, where government service delivery was lacking and where little or no provisions were made for young people; in other words, often racially divided areas where non-white youths had little opportunity to entertain themselves in lavish night clubs or even had the money to do this. The latter does not suggest however that break dancing is the same everywhere. It is evident that specific cultural and social situations of a particular locale will influence the form and style of break dancing. This paper is an exploration of how break dancing manifests itself in a South African town by South African dancers.

Dramatis Personae

Daniel 'Pang' du Plessis, 20, average height, moustache, always wears a beanie on his head to dance. He says he got his name when he was five years old - there was a

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<sup>3</sup> The Master of Ceremonies, he (or she) is the person who oversees the dance and music event.

bench he used to sit on in his house and friends and family used to say “Pang sit op die bang”<sup>4</sup>.

Siyanda ‘Carrots’ Vanis, 23, tall with long, skinny limbs. He smiles a fair bit, causing the three parallel scars on the right side of his mouth to distort. He also knows how to do *Kwaito*<sup>5</sup> dancing.

Wallace ‘Wak’ Wessels, 22, also tall, also skinny. His signature move is the Air Flare. He apparently got his name from always being late and from a word that rhymes with the expletive that people would use to shout at him.

Roscoe ‘Flirt’ Brooks, 17, in matric at Mary Waters High School. Short, stocky with an amazing amount of energy radiating from his moves.

Myron ‘Tooth’ Williams, 17, also short, but not as much as Roscoe, also exploding with energy as he dances but seems to spend more time watching the others dance. One of his front, upper incisors is missing.

Malvern ‘Mike/Matrix’ Elbrecht, 21; Matrix is his B-boy name, Mike is his shortened name. Matrix and Kamma are the only members who have permanent jobs.

Ian ‘DJ Kamma’ Keulder, 33, seems to be the manager of the group but says he does not like to be referred to as such because firstly, people might not like him, and secondly, it makes him feel old. He is skinny with very long dreadlocks and he wears them tied in a knot at the back of his head, covered with a yellow “Bionic Breaker” bandana. He is a self-confessed Pop ‘n Locker.

The dancers come from the same area in Grahamstown – Hoegenog, an area in the surrounding townships of Grahamstown. Originally set out during apartheid under the 1950’s Group Areas Act (where different races as classified under the regime were only allowed to live and work in designated divisions), it is a predominantly ‘Coloured’<sup>6</sup> area (Lemon 2004: 272). The “Coloured area” (as the dancers refer to it – sometimes, in jest, they say “the ghetto”) forms a “transitional belt” before the black townships (Lemon 2004: 272). During apartheid White, Indian, Coloured and Black inhabitants of Grahamstown were separated into ‘racial’ areas. These areas are still very visible in 2010 (*ibid*). The Bionic Breakers initially began dancing on an open field in Hoegenog, now they have moved to the Princess Alice Hall, on African Street. This is also where the academy is situated and where crew members teach break dancing classes. It is here where the majority of my fieldwork took place. Every Tuesday and Thursday evening and every Saturday morning, I joined the break dancers in dancing in the Princess Alice Hall. I joined them at one audition for SA’s Got Talent, and I joined them at a break dancing battle in East London, Eastern Cape. Those taxi drives back and forth gave me a

<sup>4</sup> Pang sits on the bench (said in colloquial language, it only rhymes when said in Afrikaans)

<sup>5</sup> The genre *Kwaito* is a style of South African Black contemporary dance-music. Kwaito dancing is done to Kwaito music, a mixture of American Hip Hop music, European house music among other international sounds (Stephens 2000: 256)

<sup>6</sup> The reference term ‘coloured’ in the South African sense refers to people of mixed skin colour backgrounds. While coloured in many other countries is an immensely derogatory term, in South Africa, the term has been claimed by coloured people as a means of identification and a heritage and ‘culture’ unto itself. I have used this term because this is how the dancers identified themselves to be throughout my fieldwork and therefore, I have chosen to use this word and not a *politically correct* term which clouds part of who these young men are.

great opportunity to see interactions within the crew. That East London battle provided me with opportunity to speak to break dancers in other crews, and I spent time sitting in the back yard of the houses, eating crisps and drinking Coke – an activity that the dancers mirrored in their back yards in Grahamstown. Grahamstown is a small city, and so regularly I bumped into the dancers in town centre. However, much of their time was spent in their homes and back yards. The next discussion will be on the multiple identities present within a crew, within each dancer – how they portray themselves in different locales and how this affects the places they choose to dance. I also tackle the stereotypes and perceptions of the identity of a young coloured man in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Finally I consider the implications of the intersection of these stereotypes and new identities that are formed and expressed in Grahamstown’s public spaces.

### Let’s Kill a Monkey Flare: Multiple Identities in Dance

One of the important observations that I have made in my time with the Bionic Breakers and learning about break dancing is this: there is more than one narrative being played out. When one sees a dancer break dancing it is a somewhat violent experience inasmuch as the moves are abrupt and inelegant, articulating a hegemonic masculinity by the show of power and dominance. By aggressively challenging the opponent with stomping, or stopping a move abruptly right in front of them, or by waving their crotch in the air, dancers project a very angry collective mentality. Engel (2001) says in her article on break dancing in Copenhagen that the essence of this dance style is the creativity it demands and the ability to play with forms and shapes of the body (p. 367). She calls it the poetic dancer – just as a poet struggles with words to convey messages in an interesting and succinct way, so a dancer grapples with using the music and moving their bodies through the sound. Yet it is also more than this; it is the dancer responding to external influences – how they relate to their world and how they use this in their dancing.

Yet the facial expressions of the dancers tell a whole other story. My dance teacher taught me the most about this storytelling when he stopped me dancing one day and said:

“Lauren, you must look up, not at the ground, and you must dance with expression on your face.”

I looked a little confused at this and so he said again,

“Watch me.”

Off he went, into a Brooklyn Rock and while panting told me to look at his face. He was grinning. And then he stopped and pointed to his face.

“Look,” he told me again, “I am smiling; I am joking with my dance partner. But look,” he pointed again, “I can also be cross,” and then he frowned, “but I mainly dance like this,” and he pointed with both hands to his face and he smiled again.

The Brooklyn Rock, ironically, is a dance move that enacts a fist fight. Step one is the lunge forward onto one foot, lifting the other, punching inwards with both fists. Step two is the lunge backwards, front foot lifted now, upper body and arms thrown backwards in an attempt to dodge the imaginary opponent’s return punch. And then there is a little

foot dance: the quick alternating jump between legs, three times, simulates the dancer kicking at the opponent's shins and/or Achilles tendons, in a final attempt to beat the (once again) imaginary opponent. I say imaginary because one of the most important things about a battle is "... moenie raak'ie,"<sup>7</sup> so there is no physical manifestation of the Brooklyn Rock. It is all made real through body movement and the audience's imagination.

Imagination is one of the most fundamental parts of storytelling. Any child would know this. And any good children's book author knows how important it is to leave enough non-description in a story to allow for the reader's imagination to fill the gap.

That dancing becomes a symbol of pleasure is evident in the way the body moves in the music and responds to the beats. Engel (2001) says the intense concentration, the removal of the self from the physical world into a place where only the body and the moment exists shows the dancer embodying the present (p.369). The memory of the dance is held in the muscles that respond to the music. From my experience, overthinking the dance moves dulls their intensity and power. By simply letting the music and the muscle memory lead the body through the dance, the pleasure of being in the present, without worry of past or future, becomes the sole purpose of break dancing. Each dancer has a personal way of dancing. Below I describe two of the dancers' individual way of dancing:

### Embodying the Present

Break dancing, with its emphasis on improvisation gives the dancer what Engel (2001) calls an "embodied sense of being present" (p.370). To draw on the dancing of Matrix, he allows the music to take him to a place where he needs not think about what moves he can and should do. Instead he just allows his body to move on its own, finding a place within the sound that he particularly likes and then allowing his body to respond accordingly. He can often be found dancing in view of the mirror and so he engages his sight sense to tell if a move is pleasing to other eyes. By embodying the present the element of escapism is close by, because by thinking of nothing except the present, one need not think about past mistakes or future stresses. I asked a friend of his in the crew why they both dance in similar ways (he is a friend who used to dance in Grahamstown but now lives in Port Alfred and occasionally visits the Bionic Breakers). He spoke quickly and eagerly, telling me that it was because the man who taught him and Matrix was also a Capoeirista<sup>8</sup> and so taught them to be light on their feet. If quick thinking, improvisation and "choreographing" is needed, the dancers tend to look to Matrix for help in that. Saggies Man, Saggies<sup>9</sup>

If on the other hand they want spectacle and a move to stun the audiences, they look to Wak. He is the only one in the crew who can do an Air Flare. He does it regularly

<sup>7</sup> "Moet nie raak nie". Afrikaans meaning: "Don't touch..."

<sup>8</sup> An experienced Capoeira dancer.

<sup>9</sup> Translation: "Gently dude, gently".

and his Air Flare draws applause from the rest of the dancers, especially when he makes quite a few rotations.

The technique is how to get oneself into the move. In the Princess Alice Hall, Wak's dance moves tend to be slower and lending themselves towards contortions and balance. What makes a good Air Flare is control and balance of the body. If you go too fast, the body gets into a "speed wobble" and throws the dancer off balance. Too slow and you are unable to spin. The Air Flare looks like the dancer is in the hand-stand position, but is turning in on himself by means of transferring the weight from arm to arm and creating the effect of jumping from hand to hand.

This move requires control. Lil' C, American dancer and co-creator of the nu-style of Hip Hop dancing called *krumping* told dancers on a television program that while Hip Hop (and break dancing) dancing has the air of chaos and danger, the dancer needs to find a point of stillness and control inside themselves which then makes the difficult moves appear easy<sup>10</sup>. Not only does this calmness play out in Wak's dancing, it also translates into his personality. Not a big talker, he comes across as a shy person. When he talks, he has little to say, getting to the point soon. More often he talks by saying nothing. In East London, I saw B-boy Skip, Hugo and Wak analysing the Air Flare. Few words are spoken but bodies are moved and questions are asked by simply pointing to the body part that is in use. Wak becomes present in his body as he tests his balance, feels the weight of his body and turns over in his mind how the move will play out. Skip says to him, "saggies, man, saggies"<sup>11</sup>. From side to side, he shifts his body weight on his legs, getting himself ready for the move, turning inwards to his body, becoming in touch with its weight, its balance, its strength. Then he does the Air Flare, repeatedly. Some of the Bionic Breaker dancers try but alas, their bodies move too quickly and their balances are thrown off. It was here on this road that I contemplated the importance of "the street" in dancing. Break dancing originated, according to oral myth passed down from generation to generation, on "the street" and in public spaces. Yet South Africa has a complicated relationship with public space.

### Breaking the Streets (and Roads)

I always thought that without music there would be no break dancing. But this above scene in East London, where in complete silence, Wak danced his move, proved me wrong. And it was in East London that for the first time I understood the *significance* of the street to break dancing – the freedom to be able to dance anywhere, regardless of whether the floors are sprung<sup>12</sup> or is covered with dance mats<sup>13</sup>. This is a dance for anywhere anytime, and being able to dance it in full view of passers-by just adds to the

<sup>10</sup> The American hit series *So You Think You Can Dance*

<sup>11</sup> Translation: "Gently dude, gently".

<sup>12</sup> Ideal flooring for dancing, meaning the floor is not solid (concrete or tiles) and therefore aids the dancer in jumping high and landing softly.

<sup>13</sup> Slip-resistance matting often placed over the sprung floors, especially needed for ballet and contemporary dance.

status to which a dancer can lay claim – they identify themselves as a dancer by using their bodies to communicate the fact that they are dancers to anybody who happens to be watching

Roads have significance in South Africa as symbolising more than just a route for cars and transport. Fox (2000) reminds us that roads were an integral part of apartheid, transporting labour from rural to urban areas and back again, ensuring constant supplies of workers to bolster the white ruled cities of the country (p. 443). The roads were a symbol of power. Roads were used to cut off white residences from non-white townships and roads were a symbol of control of who was allowed to move where (*ibid*). Slowly, nearer to the end of apartheid roads became symbols of resistance where protests and riots took place in the streets (Fox 2000: 444). By looking at the symbolism of the street, especially in the South African context, it gives insight into what symbol the street plays in the construction of a South African break dancer's identity.

Just as protests and riots are a means of opposition, so is dancing in an undemarcated “dance” area. Imagine walking down the road and suddenly a group of youths break out into dancing. Public place that was set aside for walking, for sitting, for waiting is transformed without the authorities' permission. By “breaking the law” and using public property to dance on, in and around, the street becomes a symbol of the freedom that the dancers have over their bodies and their lives, even though there may still be many other constraints on them as individuals and groups. The dancers subvert the original symbolism of the road and embody its symbol of power – except it is the young and the marginalised who hold the power, not the other way around. Thus break dancing becomes a way of breaking away from convention and constructing a place for themselves outside of the conventions that society places on them (school, work, money, success). The road becomes a play and a means to reconstruct the “coloured” body.

### The Coloured(ful) Body

The road has been a symbol of power and resistance. Nuttall (2004) however argues that academics need to interrogate whether South Africa has an identity apart from its apartheid legacy (p. 732). In my view there are other elements, historical and contemporary, that affect identity. She says that when theorists study ‘the city’ or ‘youth’, these categories are often embedded within a framework of differences and separation (*ibid*). To be Coloured under apartheid laws meant that the person was neither black nor white and the category acted as a kind of buffer between the two. This meant that the Coloured identity has been constructed as an in-between space, as being creolised and therefore having no concrete history and heritage to lay claim to (Nuttall 2004: 733). To consider the body as a sight (a place) of identity construction is one such way to find new elements in identity construction (how the body itself, through its physicality, becomes an agent in creating the identity of a person).

A few of the dancers have made it evident that they want success but are not pursuing positions of status and success. To those who do not really know the crew, this lack of ‘action’ can come across as being unmotivated in life. The way I see it, because

coloured men and specifically Coloured break dancers are cast as the jobless, hypersexualised and seen as potentially violent (Wicomb 1998) it is easy for the Coloured man, and especially the Coloured dancer who is not working and who appears violent in his dancing, to be associated with these negative stereotypes.

Consider when Pang, referring to the act of teaching me how to do a new move, says, "Let's kill a Monkey Flare". This kind of statement contains violent undertones un-Hip Hop-educated people could interpret as gang language. With just a hint of a grin, Pang means that we are going to get it right first time; we are going to nail it, beat it and not let it get us down (in other words, we will not fail at getting it right). As said before, the dancers break the dance, literally and figuratively. Dancers dance to break-beats, they achieve a style of dancing originally referred to as "breaking" (...the norms of conventional dancing?). The music that informs their moves is a "break" beat, and they break away from conventions of success and break the stereotypes of violence in a coloured community. It also becomes a means of coping in a situation where people may continuously tell them that they will not succeed. It is not a violent response to failure. Instead by using this 'violent' dance within a broader context of clowning and spectacle, the dance subverts the 'violent' body of a Coloured break dancer into a body using movement to cope and to articulate who they are to anybody willing to listen to their message (Deyhle 1986: 126). Break dancing is hybridised and in my view becomes a safe space in which an already in-between identity can find meaning and a place to fit in. And it becomes a place of "killing" the moves and not letting themselves be trumped by the complexity of the dance and of negotiating a position of status within the community. And there is a pleasure in getting a move right, a pleasure beyond the senses, in 'feeling' the euphoria at getting it right, time and time again. In this way, once again, dance for pleasure becomes an end to itself (as Nuttall and Michael 2000 suggest).

Break dancing as an urban youth phenomenon (to those who ascribe to it) is just that - found in the urban areas, the cities of South Africa. In 2002 when break dancing first came to Grahamstown as the newest fad, the youngsters had their pieces of cardboard out in the street, under street-lights at night, breaking in the streets of Grahamstown (according to Matthew). Then the enthusiasm began to wane and the streets emptied. Now the only breaking happens in the Princess Alice Hall (and occasionally Mary Waters High School field).

Battersby (2003) says, that by claiming and naming places and spaces, the colonial powers took ownership of areas that were previously not theirs and denied anyone else access to these areas (p. 115). Now the Bionic Breakers, through the use of the Princess Alice Hall in the Central Business District of Grahamstown, begin to reshape their identities by claiming space that was long ago denied to people of their colour. By entering a previously 'white-only area' and being allowed to do this, shows that they are not only articulating their identity in a space other than their neighbourhood, it also shows the changing nature of space in South Africa, where spaces are no longer strictly demarcated. Spaces have begun to adopt an identity as fluid as the identity that a person can adopt.

Similarly, the dancing body of a Coloured man/boy is no longer seen as lazy or uninvolved in its own identity construction. It is a body actively participating in articulating its identity, a body that embodies notions of personhood and agency (Csordas 1994: 4). It is an identity and a body of strength. Nuttall and Michael (2000) encourage academics to find other types of bodies through which to analyse scenarios and I suggest the “strong body” could be one – the body that endures with strength, whether it be for dancing or for everyday hardships. The juxtaposition of masculine strength and non-violence dancing is an interesting way to see how a dancer constructs his/her identity. This achieved identity construction removes itself from opposition to the outside world and to stereotypes of how people should behave and instead turns inwards to the dancer and asks the question of how the dancer negotiates stereotypes and how they view themselves. And the strength can be a symbol of the changing nature of South Africa, where the individual body is in control of defining who they want to be, instead of an outside force. By allowing themselves to be immersed in pleasurable activities (in a space previously denied to them and now open to them) another body emerges – the “pleasurable body” – dance and pleasure of dance as an end to itself. One can also see how by viewing a dancer as another being who experiences pleasure by way of senses, the body can no longer be viewed as a thing separate to the mind. The body becomes embodied in analyses and takes on the role of an agent in identity constructions in as large and important a way as a verbal statement of identity. As a dancer using specific spaces in which to dance, the ways in which these places and spaces influenced the dancers’ construction of identity is important an element to consider, especially in the South African context.

### Place and Space

In the context of the city, youth identity has been overlooked in place of urban migration and all the evils that followed from this migration of rural labour (Nuttall 2004: 740). One of the most profound claims regarding the city is that people affect what the city means by creating for themselves an identity (de Certeau 1984, cited in Nuttall 2004: 740). Instead of the city being seen as shaping a person’s identity, the above statement claims that theories have failed to look at how the individual – regardless of whether they are aware of it or not – in fact shapes the city. Most often, the individual in constructing his/her own identity is unaware of how they affect the identity of the city (*ibid*). Gasa (2010), on talking about space, says that as much as a person tries to claim space, space also claims them in the way that they behave in a certain space. There is a continuum of influence running between the two effectors of identity – the person and the city. So as much as the break dancers react in a certain way to a space, the space too is shaped by how the dancers use the area.

In the area of Princess Alice Hall, there are few people whom the dancers know and can relate to easily. The dancers and I still struggle to relate to each other and even after months of working with them, we can still experience awkward moments. The dancers have their ‘comfort-zones’ (their home and neighbourhoods) where they feel

most at ease. They also have to enter the spaces and places where they may not feel as comfortable (the hall). In this way, the hall shapes the dancers identities. Outside the hall they would come across as shy, awkward and not very confident of their abilities. They would stand with their shoulders hunched, their hands thrust deep into their pockets and pressed up against the hedge that lines the front of the hall. It was an attempt to be as inconspicuous as possible in an area that was unfamiliar to them. People would walk past them without the slightest glance.

Once inside the hall they relaxed more. What is significant is that at the start of my research there seemed to be very definite places where each dancer moved, as well as designated "student" areas. It was the dancers who made the first move to invite me into their space, showing their acceptance of a new dancer. I presumed there would have been some other formal acknowledgement. This is important inasmuch as dancing crews are considered to be a form of a gang, wherein members are initiated. This shows that membership and access to a 'break dancer' identity is fluid and not constrained to who the crew members themselves bring into the group (this is similar to how constructions of identity are fluid and not constrained to certain elements).

After a few months of regular dancing in the hall, I saw a definite shift in the dancers' mentalities regarding the dance space. One evening I drove to the hall and turned into the BP Petrol Station opposite the hall. While the car was being filled with petrol, I watched the dancers waiting outside the hall for the yoga class to finish. Pang and Wak were there and from the distance and in the fading light I was unsure but I thought Flirt was there as well. Casually and confidently they were dancing outside on the pavement. Mainly they seemed to be practicing their balances. People walking past the hall had to step aside and walk for a short distance in the road. There was no fear in the passers-by, just acceptance. For the time before the class the dancers not only "owned" the hall but they also "owned" the space outside. Their bodies were no longer foreign bodies but skillful dancing bodies.

I have watched the dancers become more confident in dancing in the town centre. This is not to say that they were ever confident before and that opening the Academy has changed the lives of the dancers. But by coming into a space that before this time had seen little of this type of dancing has meant that the dancers have been creating a space for themselves in the town centre, where before their space was predominantly the "coloured area" (as they call it). They have done this in a similar way as women are making a space for themselves in rap music (Keyes 2004) – by empowering themselves (in opening a dance school) and by making choices (about who they are in a dance space and as a dancer). By making themselves visible in Grahamstown they are slowly beginning to break away at the stereotypes surrounding break dancing, young coloured men, and the whole Hip Hop Movement. Yet another interesting observation is that if people do not understand what break dancing means for a dancer, they may interpret the dancer's presence in a negative way, following the already constructed image of break dancers as violent or as possibly criminal elements. Regardless, they are now bringing with them ideas and their individual and collective identity as break dancers into

Grahamstown city centre. This will, in the long run, begin to affect the way the city identifies itself (how it will develop remains to be seen).

One also needs to consider the fact that the dancers have been inviting people into their space to learn their dance. It has not been a creating of dance space separate from the Grahamstown population as a whole. This means that the identity of b-boy is available to more than just them. After three months of dancing with the crew, Flirt and Tooth gave me a b-girl name – Fully Girl, because I spoke a lot, was the only woman dancer and I danced saggies<sup>14</sup> (the latter is my own addition). As I said in the beginning, once a dancer becomes a b-boy (or b-girl) their whole energy changes and they become not just a student but a legitimate break dancer as well. To take on the identity of a break dancer is to be in a space that is filled with the sounds, sights, smells and feelings of the dance form; it is also about being confident in this identity. I was not. And a b-girl needs to embody spontaneity, clowning, acrobatics and strength. I struggle with improvisation, clowning and the strength to do the moves. Suffice to say I did not stay as a b-girl for very long. But one thing stuck in my mind, when Tooth said, “once a bgirl, you are always a bgirl”... A touching thought and one I will always remember; a token of acceptance on a group – the subculture called Hip Hop.

#### Who Wanna be a Hip-Hopper? – Break Dancing as a Sub-Culture

Dance as a subculture opens avenues for understanding alternative identities in South African youth and most specifically in the Hip Hop Movement. According to Gelder and Thornton (1997) a sub-culture can be defined as a social group organised around shared interests, interests that set them apart from other groups (cited in Potter 1996: 193). The first time youth cultures were officially named was in the 1950s when increased access to jobs and thus spending money for young people meant that young people could engage in activities outside of the home (Shuker 1994: 191). However, at this time it was thought that all young people had similar wants and were “passive consumers”, being shaped by the leisure industries and doing no shaping themselves (Shuker 1994: 192). The 1970s saw a shift from a homogenous view of youth to coin the term “sub-culture”. Youth culture saw young people as socialising in age-groups. This obscured the fact that many young people socialised according to likes, values and interests (*ibid*).

Music is one of the binding elements in a sub-culture, according to Potter (1996), and still is an important element of cohesion in the Hip Hop Movement (p.193) – music is created to listen to, dance to, sing to and inspire graffiti. Hebdige (1979) is considered to be a key theorist on sub-cultures and states that sub-cultures make their values and interests visible to the society around them by means of styles, language et cetera (cited in Shuker 1994: 193). Most importantly is that sub-cultures offer a solution (even if it is just on a ‘magical’ level) to the problems in their lives (*ibid*). They do this through creating what Shuker (1994) calls an “achieved identity”; an identity that is adopted which is

<sup>14</sup> Translation: “gently”

different to the ascribed identity that one may be born into at home or at work. In such a way, sub-cultures are a way to carve a space for oneself within a dominant discourse, and so make oneself visible in a place where there is the possibility of being forgotten or lost among the multitude of sameness.

The sub-culture of the Hip Hop crew becomes a support/socialisation network. They go most places together. Whenever the Bionic Breakers come into the central business district of Grahamstown they come as a group. Regardless of age, they socialise in most cases within the crew. The crew becomes the support network where most of their information is passed. The dancers do not necessarily want the crew to be a deviant and alternative group but a few Grahamstown residents seem to think that the break dancers are 'different' and separate to the rest of the town. As discussed above, the ascribed identity of many young coloured men is of violent under achiever, and separate as the Grahamstown residents seemed to think. However, the achieved identity that these young dancers create for themselves is of a successful achiever in their chosen art form, channeling their 'violence' into their dance.

The fact that Grahamstown residents see the dancers as separate does not mean that they are closed off to the dancers. In my last month working with them, Pang approached me to help the crew start workshops with schools in Grahamstown. When I proposed the idea to a few schools in the town, even though most had not heard of the Bionic Breakers, all were very eager to have the crew give dance workshops to the school students. When one thinks of the city, there is this underlying assumption that the city is a large machine that controls the behaviours of the people under its command (Nuttall 2004: 740). One forgets that people make up a city and therefore people influence the way the city as a whole 'behaves'. Without saying that the Break Dancing Academy has changed the lives of the dancers and the perceptions of the town, I feel that because the dancers have carved a space for themselves in the Central Business District (CBD) they are no longer considered an enigma, an invisible group of people. And in doing so they are also breaking through stereotypes of break dancers being violent. This is evident in the schools' willingness.

In Mitchell's (1956) study of the Kalela dance similar themes of a sub-culture can be found. The dancers of the Kalela are found on the mines in the Copper Belt of what was in the 1950s Northern Rhodesia (p. 1). The way he has written about the dance is from a style reminiscent of the early dance anthropologists where the art form is reduced to analytical parts that are there purely for functional purposes. I am thus not using his work for his framework of analysis. Instead I want to use themes that he has picked up among the dancers and relate them to the break dancers in this story – themes of skill, striving for education and improving ones skill, and membership.

~\*~

*"Have they (the dancers) ever danced in the Princess Alice Hall?" I ask Kamma while we sit at  
Café Blanca.*

*“Oh yes. Yes they have. Most of the guys have done Capoeira there. A guy taught them – all of them, even the young ones”. That’s another dance to add to their repertoire, I think. Just to make sure that these dancers can call themselves Capoeirista’s<sup>15</sup> I ask “For how long did they do Capoeira?”*

*“Well, the teacher only left about three years ago, so for about five years...”*

~\*~

The Bionic Breakers dancers set themselves apart not only by dancing and dancing well, but by mastering other dance styles (as the discussion above highlights). I have observed (not only in break dancing) that when you call yourself a dancer you do not only dance one style, you are adept in other dances, mastering some better than others. To be good at more than one dance is a form of self-praise, a way to symbolise themselves as better than someone who does not have the same credentials. Here break dancing becomes political, in local terms, for status means respect and respect means success. Dance is a lived experience, and Young (2005) states that a person relates to their body in terms of a specific socio-economic context (p. 16). For the dancers in the Bionic Breakers, the body becomes a means for success and to protect against being forgotten in the masses of the Grahamstown’s population. The body holds the vehicle for self-praise and self-validation. It once again embodies experience. For the dancers of the Kalela dance, their self-praise is generated through songs that they are taught once they become part of the Kalela dance team (Mitchell 1956: 8).

To be a member of a Kalela dance group is a mark of prestige. This prestige is measured on a scale of success akin to the white businesspeople that dancers saw around them. In this way education was an important membership requirement into the dance group and status within a dance group was measured by the occupational ranking of a person (Mitchell 1956: 14). In the Bionic Breakers, DJ Kamma is a strong motivator for the dancers – he tries to get them to finish school and to find jobs. Kamma continuously refers to the collective – “we are trying to...”; “...it is our job to...”. Some of the dancers have anger problems, he tells me, or have been expelled from school. He says that “we have been working on his quick temper”. Education is not a pre-requisite to join the crew but education, of any kind, is high on the agenda. I say education of any kind because the Hip Hop Movement does not hold “Western Education” in very high esteem, mainly because segregation was taught in many governmental curricula (Dyson 2004). This is in contrast to the Kalela dancers who appear to desire that form of education (Mitchell 1956: 15). This is not to say that the dancers do not have a desire for knowledge. In Port Elizabeth, while waiting for the auditions for the television show, one of the dancers began talking to me, first asking my opinion of Home Economics subject at school and then onto sex and abortion. My opinions were listened to with grave nods and a frown

<sup>15</sup> A Capoeira dancer, like a ballerina does ballet or an actor does drama etcetera.

of concentration between his eyes. He also then tells me, after telling me he doesn't read at home because he reads at school, that they are reading Jane Austen at school. In my informed opinion, this shows a desire to be known to be knowledgeable about issues in the community and world.

The dancers know that they have skills and do not want to settle for less. It need not be the expected skills that a young man has. And their success in their lives is not motivated solely by money. When asked why he dances, Pang says it is because he gets to travel. He gets to experience new things, things that his friends who are not part of the crew may never experience. In this way as well, break dancing offers status of gaining experience and knowledge. Once again it is not conventional school knowledge; it is a break away from the norms of school and everyday life and constructing their own knowledge, of themselves and the world around them.

### We're Finished for Today<sup>16</sup>: Conclusion

So what role does break dancing have in these young men's identities? David Toop (1994) writes in *Rap Attack 2* "that competition helped to displace violence and the refuge of destructive drugs, while it also fostered an attitude of creating from limited materials" (cited in Engel 2001: 369). However, there have been times when the dancers have seemed so unfocused and uninterested in doing things in their lives, and it was only DJ Kamma and Matrix who got passionate enough to get the dancers doing something. For dancers, "fostering an attitude of creativity" possibly means something different to them than it does to me. One day, on a suggestion from one of the Academy students, Matrix danced with a shirt over his head, obscuring his vision. And when he manages it he throws down the shirt passionately and throws up his arms victoriously. He has been creative in his use of movements and space to fit the fact that he had limited vision. To be creative in the safe space that is break dancing space is enough for them to consider it a success

This paper has shown, among other things, that this dance can also be a means of pleasure as an end to itself, something the Nuttall and Michael (2000) say is a new 'body' that is emerging in studies - the pleasurable body who responds to sound, to touch and predominantly to sight. This is not to negate the fact that break dancing provides important commentary on the lives of a dancer. However, I have attempted to break away from seeing break dancing from purely a functional perspective ("explaining it away" by over-analysing everything), whereby everything that a dancer experiences has a definite function. In dance, and specifically break dancing, to dance in a space is to take a unique and personal style and inscribe it in the area of dance (Banes 2004: 14). When the dancer and the dance is looked at from the stand point of pleasure for the senses - the sight, sounds, feeling, touch and smell - one is able to see that a dancer is not some type of strange entity that is unfathomable. Instead the dancer experiences joy, pleasure, excitement and emotions similar to what everyone experiences. To understand a person through their body and their sensual experiences is to normalise the body of the

<sup>16</sup> What Pang says when we have finished training for the day

informant so that they are not the 'other' but a "lived body". The 'performing body' is a fluid body, as Csordas (1994:) states, and it embodies elements to become an active agent of identity as opposed to an object of identity.

When I first started this fieldwork I thought that in order for my informants to be 'good' informants they had to be both historically and politically aware of Hip Hop's place in the greater society. Repeatedly I got nothing of what I expected. Eventually I encountered Deyhle's (1986) ethnography on break dancing in an Indian border Reservation school and the situation was similar to the one found in Grahamstown. In her words, they were unconcerned with the history of break dancing but knew why they did it – for some it was to keep out of trouble, for others it was "cool" and "neat". For the dancers that I interviewed, to dance "keeps them busy and out of trouble" (Tooth) and is simply a way to travel (Pang), to see new places and thus to once again raise their status. They have almost-exclusive membership to this group that offers opportunity and success.

Break dancing in Grahamstown, I argue, is not only about opposition or social commentary; it is also a form of escapism. For the two hours that the dancers dance, there is a child-like innocence where they embody the present moment and worry only about the next beat or the next move and not about the past or the future. In this space they transcend the stereotype of the coloured body being violent and create an identity of the break dancer as being supple, spontaneous and clown-like, eager to learn and eager to teach. Historically, women have been considered to be closer to and more in touch with their bodies than men (Shildrick and Price 1999: 2). Yet by embodying the present moment within the dancing body, regardless of whether one is male or female, the dancer becomes in touch with their bodies. Similarly, by becoming in touch with their dance space (the Hall) the dancers are transcending the stereotypes of the violent break dancer, through simply using their bodies to dance – to dance a dance that many think to be violent, and to be accepted as dancers in their own right in the greater town. In my view, this has a lot to do with the fact that the dancers do not keep themselves separate from other people, but have opened themselves and invited people into their space. They have done this predominantly through opening the Break Dancing Academy and teaching people what it means and feels to be a b-boy (or b-girl).

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## **Interview: Hip Hop and Activism in Kenya**

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### **Moses Mbasu aka Buddha Blaze**

Buddha Blaze is a Kenyan-based Hip Hop activist who participated and presented at the Hip Hop Symposium in Nairobi on April 17th, 2013. He is a well-respected writer, organizer and promoter of Hip Hop in Kenya and beyond and is the co-founder of WAPI, one of the biggest platforms for underground Hip Hop artists in Kenya. The following piece is an interview that a member of the Afrikan Hip Hop Caravan organising team and guest editor of this anthology, Katja Kellerer, held with Buddha Blaze via email in September 2013. The set of questions addresses a wide range of issues. In addition to outlining his personal involvement in Hip Hop activism and specific projects, including the Afrikan Hip Hop Caravan, the interview offers insights into Blaze's views and perceptions of local Hip Hop scenes as well as global Hip Hop culture.

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### **When and how were you introduced to Hip Hop?**

I was introduced to Hip Hop in my teenage years. I lived in Europe and when I was young living in a different culture, the only thing that could really connect me to the general society at the time was Hip Hop. I fell in love with it because it changed my view of life. Being a black kid living in a white country there was no aspect of European life I connected with. The only thing I connected with were the black kids from all over the world and the most common factor at the time was Hip Hop.

### **What does Hip Hop mean to you? What are the fundamental elements of Hip Hop culture?**

Hip Hop to me is a way of life; it's a consciousness that guides me through my life whether I'm doing business just making life decisions. Before I listened to Hip Hop, I had lost direction; I had lost hope in life. The Hip Hop principles of love, keeping it real and community awareness help me make those decisions. For me Hip Hop was more than music because it made me a focused person, it put me in line. It pulled me from the depths of emptiness; it fixed me and made me into a better human being.

### **You describe yourself as a Hip Hop activist. What does this mean?**

Hip Hop activist means always fighting for the understanding of Hip Hop culture: organizing Hip Hop meetings, events and initiatives, protecting Hip Hop artists and preserving the culture, as well as educating the masses about the culture. I hosted the first serious Hip Hop event in Kenya that put Kenyan rappers on edge. It was called Rap and Vibe. I then went on to manage the biggest Hip Hop movement so far in Africa called WAPI (Words and Pictures). This event has been the biggest platform so far supporting Hip Hop acts in the region. The big names in Kenyan Hip Hop now have come from this platform. Top Kenyan Hip Hop artists such as Octopizzo, Khaligraph, Rabbit, and Juliani

are all Hip Hop scholars that were elevated into the game by WAPI. This was the platform that first gave them a chance to perform. Hip Hop to me has always been about giving back and for me WAPI was the biggest giving back initiative I have ever participated in. With the overwhelming success of these artists in their own careers, I feel like I participated in their growth therefore being an activist against poverty and an activist of change. Their success leads to many families having food on their tables and going to school. I'm therefore directly responsible for the growth of a whole generation of families. That's what being an activist is all about, directly affecting people where it matters the most.

### **Are you part of any Hip Hop organizations or collectives?**

Yes, I am part of a number of organizations. I was one of the founding members of one of the biggest Hip Hop movements in Africa, called WAPI, which took place all over Africa. We went to Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Ghana, South Sudan, and even Zanzibar. WAPI has now also been enthusiastically adopted in Brazil. I'm also the founder of Nairobi Rapsody. Nairobi Rapsody is a weekly Hip Hop networking event in Nairobi. So far it has hosted lots of DJs and will keep moving higher. We started out as a DJ event, but it has grown slowly to cater for artist performances. WAPI stands for Words and Pictures and it was a movement that started in 2006; when there was a huge explosion of Hip Hop creativity in Kenya and on the African continent. There was a lot of underground expression at the time such as graffiti, MCing, DJing and fashion. All this energy needed to be mobilized to make artists earn a living from it in a formalized way. WAPI was that platform that brought all these Hip Hop elements together under one event and venue. We were given free support and performance space at the British Council in Nairobi and before you knew it, it became the most popular hangout spot in Nairobi. This was later formatted into a program by the British Council and I was contracted to go and create similar spaces all over Africa; in Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria, Uganda and Zanzibar. The mission of WAPI was to create awareness for underground Hip Hop culture and industry and for the first time we had engagement with corporates, the big leagues, and artists started to be taken seriously and prosper. The movement has really helped the Hip Hop industry in Africa with highlighting the elements.

### **Can Hip Hop be used as a tool to mobilize for social justice?**

Hip Hop is a tool of social justice and has been used in that way many times. My movement, WAPI, has taken many young people off the streets and has created a great future for them. That's social justice. In 2008, when Kenya had an uprising, I did a peace concert and had young people professing peace and an end to the warring. That peace moment that happened during WAPI was used as a sign to show that young people were united while politicians were the real culprits of violence and war mongering. I have used Hip Hop to spread messages of hope, peace and change. WAPI gave young people a sense of pride that wasn't there before. There was no time before where a group of young

people was given this much attention, protection, and leeway, as they were given at WAPI. The youth felt safe there and the movement protected them. Therefore these artists and young people always felt that WAPI was their voice of reason and would use it as the tool of engagement with the streets, the media and so on.

### **What is the current socio-political situation in Kenya and how does Hip Hop relate to it?**

Kenya has come from a dark place politically, an era in which freedom of speech was not guaranteed. When Hip Hop came into the picture all that did change. Hip Hop gave the youth a chance to express themselves in a way that no other medium had done before. That freedom of speech was visibly participated by the Hip Hop community and it was won. The political situation is at crossroads now and Hip Hop has been at the forefront of fighting for political awareness and consciousness. Hip Hop is responsible for fighting the old mentality. In the old days of Africa young people were not allowed to question their elders even when the latter was obviously wrong. Hip Hop was the first time that young Africans could openly criticize their elders. Even though Africa had won so called freedom from its oppressors, it seemed as though the African leaders themselves had also become tyrants oppressing their own people. Ukoo Flani's songs always reminded Kenyan youth that the freedom that our forefathers (Mau Mau) had fought for had been compromised by greedy leaders. Hip Hop changed the way young people reasoned with their elders in Kenya and has created a respectable communication chain. Young people's voices are now more respected than ever before and the elders know that the young have a big part to play in democracy and development. Check Ukoo Flani's critically acclaimed song - '*Angalia Saa*' which means 'Look at the Time.'

### **What is the state of the Hip Hop Scene in Kenya?**

Hip Hop in Kenya is still at its infant stage but a lot is moving in the positive direction. There's so much potential. Every hood has a studio and people are yearning for more. Initially it started off with a major bang, with groups such as Kalamashaka, Ukoo Flani Mau Mau, and K South, but with the influx of too much bubblegum music it lost a bit of its luster for a while. With movements such as WAPI, the community found its legs again and is coming back to life. The next big African Hip Hop star will come from Kenya.

### **Is there such a thing as 'Afrikan Hip Hop' and if so, how would you define it?**

Yes there is definitely such a thing called African Hip Hop and that is true Hip Hop done by Africans and addressing the various problems afflicting Africa. Before this, there was a struggle for identity but with time Africans have found a way of fusing their sounds and lyrics with global Hip Hop culture. Hip Hop done by Africans has to find its rightful place on the global scene. By creating its own identity, sound and agenda African Hip

Hop has become a major force to be reckoned with and has created a booming industry with endless creative avenues.

### **How and why did you get involved in the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan?**

Being a practitioner and investor in Kenyan Hip Hop industry, I was contacted by the organizers. I'm always willing to support Hip Hop initiatives globally and in my own country because it's a community thing. The Hip Hop community in Kenya is not that big so whenever there's anything concerning Hip Hop happening most of us will either be personally invited or will be the ones facilitating the event. In fact the only reason I didn't organize the Kenyan leg of this initiative is because I was held up at the International Hip Hop Festival at Trinity College so I couldn't make it back to Kenya on time to organize it. This is a great movement to unite the Hip Hop community globally. For me it always feels great when I connect with other Hip Hop minds doing different things in the name of the culture. Whether at home or abroad, I love the energy that Hip Hop organizers exude and I always feel at home when working with new Hip Hop people. The Caravan is a meeting place for different cultures, styles, people and music and highly I appreciate being involved with it.

### **Hip Hop is a global movement with its roots in New York's Bronx. How can it be utilized to address local struggles?**

Everywhere you go you will find this subculture and because Hip Hop has been adopted as a social movement it always begins with the community. This is by associating and plugging into what the community needs and what opportunities are out there for the people. Hip Hop is a voice of the community. Every community regardless of where it is needs to make hip hop work for that community. That can be done by localizing the message so the community can feel like they belong to it. Artists need to educate themselves on what Hip Hop has successfully done in many communities worldwide.

## Chant Down tha System 'till Babylon Falls: The Political Dimensions of Urban Grooves and Underground Hip Hop in Zimbabwe

Katja Kellerer

Katja Kellerer is a Hip Hop activist and scholar who has been part of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan organizing team since 2012. Her main task centers on the planning and execution of the Hiphop Conferences in partnership with local universities. She currently is working as a research assistant at the Institute for African and Asian Studies at the Humboldt University, Berlin and is also writing her Ph.D. thesis about the language and politics of Hip Hop in Zimbabwe. Her article, which first has been published in the *Journal of Pan African Studies* (2013, Volume 6, Issue 3), is a shortened version of her M.A. thesis in which she traces the trajectories and ideologies of two separate, but intertwined, youth movements in Harare, Zimbabwe: Urban Grooves and Underground Hip Hop.

*Used with permission. First published in Journal of Pan African Studies vol.6, no.3, September 2013*

Since its arrival in the 1980s<sup>1</sup>, Hip Hop culture, especially the element of rap, has shaped youth culture in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital and major hub of cultural activity. Yet, in congruence with the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of Hip Hop, two different youth movements in Zimbabwe have appropriated aspects of this culture and they differ vastly in regards to their perception of its definition and mission: Underground Hiphop and Urban Grooves. The former perceives Hip Hop as a culture connected to a global Hip Hop movement that is devoted to advocating Hip Hop's original vision as the voice of the oppressed; whereas the latter, which dominates the contemporary urban youth music scene, can be best described as an umbrella term for a style of popular music that combines the local with the global: the rhythms and beats, generally digitally-produced, are taken from international music, predominantly dancehall, soul, R&B, and rap, yet, the young artists add a local flavor by singing or rapping in Shona or Ndebele, the two dominant national languages of Zimbabwe.

Since some elements of Hip Hop, rapping and fashion style, are defining features of both movements, the dividing line between them is blurred. Indeed, many close-observers of the local music scene define Urban Grooves as Zimbabwean Hip Hop. The "veteran music journalist" (Eyre 96), Maxwell Sibanda, for instance, describes Urban Grooves as, "[...] a grouping of artists, especially youngsters, who call their music Urban Grooves but actually it is Hip Hop."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Bere argues that Zimbabwean Hip Hop, through a process of localization and popularization, has developed into Urban Grooves (93).

<sup>1</sup> According to Metaphysics, break-dancing was the first element that caught the attention of youth and kick-started the development of a local rap scene in the 1980s (personal interview).

<sup>2</sup> Maxwell Sibanda, interview by author, February 25, 2012.

However, it is important to clearly differentiate between Underground Hip-hop and Urban Grooves, since the 'underground' status of the Hip Hop movement, on one side, and the emergence of Urban Grooves as a mainstream genre in early 2000, on the other, are tied up with specific political developments in Zimbabwe. The ZANU(PF) government, confronted with a fully-fledged political and economic crisis and the rise of a strong opposition movement at the turn of the century, embarked upon a large-scale propaganda project in an effort to assert their hegemony. Urban youth music, including rap, was targeted as one key factor to promulgate the state ideology. This move has led to the conclusion that Hip Hop in Zimbabwe has been appropriated by the state. As Palmberg notes, "What is special for Zimbabwe is that hip-hop and rap belong to the category of state-sponsored music" (31).

Although it is undoubtedly true that rap music affiliated with Urban Grooves has lent itself to boost the state's narrative or at least acquiesces to it, this account offers a one-sided and limited portrayal of Hip Hop in Zimbabwe. To equate Zimbabwean Hip Hop with Urban Grooves is not only too simplistic because it ignores the generic nature of Urban Grooves, it also tends to overlook that the rappers amongst the Urban Groovers are not the only ones who spit rhymes and lay claim to representing Hip Hop in Zimbabwe. There is a small, but vibrant Hip Hop community, the Underground Hip-hop scene, that values rap for its uplifting, inspiring and socio-political message. Yet, this movement dwells in the underground and is less visible, while rappers affiliated with Urban Grooves dominate the airwaves. Socially and politically conscious Hip Hop heads generally struggle to receive airplay in the mainstream media across the globe.<sup>3</sup> In Zimbabwe, however, the mainstream/underground split is connected to the fact that the ZANU(PF) government consciously promoted youngsters to record either apolitical or pro-government music, which eventually would become known as Urban Grooves, in order to connect with youth and to stifle any form of protest music, including 'conscious' Hip Hop.

In order to illustrate this argument, this article, which is predominantly based upon interviews and lyric excerpts,<sup>4</sup> traces the trajectory of both movements and provides clear definitions. By doing so, I am going to illustrate Urban Grooves' assimilation into the state apparatus and Hip Hop's movement into the 'underground', thus elucidating, in KRS-One's words, what it means to be Underground,<sup>5</sup> in the Zimbabwean context. Finally, since Urban Groovers, as well as Underground Hip-hop artists, have been attacked on the ground that they are mere copycats of their U.S.

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3 In American Hip-hop Studies, the commodification of Hip-hop culture, which contributed to a mainstream/underground dichotomy, has been widely discussed (cf. Rose 2008). Haupt outlines that 'conscious' Hip-hop artists in South Africa and the U.S. experience similar difficulties to reach the airwaves in their country's respective corporate controlled music industries. Yet, while in these two contexts major record labels function as gatekeepers, in Zimbabwe, the state has assumed this role.

4 My research is predominantly based upon interviews that I conducted during two research trips to Harare - the first one from August to October 2011 and the second one from January to March 2012.

5 KRS-One released a song, entitled "What does it mean to be Underground" on his album, *Krystyles*.

counterparts, issues surrounding the contradictory and complex field of the global versus the local are addressed.

### From Positive Afrocentrism and Radical Pan-Africanism: The Pioneers of Zimbabwean Hip Hop

When asked about the beginnings of Zimbabwean Hip Hop, current underground emcees point to A Peace of Ebony (POE) and Shingirayi Sabeta aka Mau Mau. Both have managed to break through the stranglehold international pop music possessed over the airwaves in the 90s and, based upon their originality and lyrical prowess, have left a lasting mark on the development of a local Hip Hop scene.

POE, which consisted of the rappers Metaphysics, Tony Chihota aka the Chief, and later Laygwan Sharkie, as well as songstress Chiwoniso Maraire, released their album, entitled "From the Native Tongue", in 1992. Two of the album's songs hit the charts on Radio 3, now Power FM – the station especially popular amongst youth – thus turning POE into the first Zimbabwean Hip Hop group frequently played on radio.<sup>6</sup> As Aero50l, a local emcee and graffiti artist, states, "it [the album] was in the charts on Radio 3, that's how you got to hear anything. If you didn't make the charts, you probably would not be heard."<sup>7</sup> And hearing a Zimbabwean Hip Hop group on radio had an impact on Aero50l:

I listened mainly to American and U.K. Hip Hop on mix-tapes and on the radio. In regards to Zimbabwean Hip Hop, POE definitely influenced me. It was probably the first time that you felt, yeah, someone else is doing something and it sounds dope.

The impact of the group is also neatly summarized in the following statement by another emcee, Upmost:

For me, Hiphop started in '92 with POE. POE was on radio then, I think this is the first time I heard local Hiphop [...]. I remember "From the Native Tongue", because it was like, "Yo, I'm African" and that was cool. It touched home. The image was something I could relate to.<sup>8</sup>

As indicated by the statements of the two emcees, POE's status as pioneers of Zimbabwean Hip Hop is further based on the fact that they infused African, or local, elements into Hip Hop music.

POE's songs were marked, musically, by a fusion of Hip Hop beats with the mbira, and lyrically, by a fusion of Shona and English, and sometimes even French. Yet, the group situated their artistic work within the aesthetic and ideological framework of Hip

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<sup>6</sup> Personal interview with Metaphysics, 26. March 2012. All other quotes from the artist, unless indicated otherwise, refer to this interview.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interview with Aero50l, 20. Feb. 2012. All other quotes from Aero50l, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

<sup>8</sup> Personal interview with Upmost, 18 February 2012. All other quotes from Upmost, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

Hop culture. In fact, the name of their album, “From the Native Tongue”, establishes a direct link to the New York-based Native Tongues – a Hip Hop collective with close ties to Afrika Bambaataa’s Universal Zulu Nation that formed in the late 1980s (Saucier xxii). The collective’s goal was to confront the sexual exploitation and violence that had started to suffuse Hip Hop culture with the emergence of Los Angeles *gangsta* rap (Torreano) and they “were known for their positive, good-natured Afrocentric lyrics” (Saucier xxi).

As implied by POE’s name itself, which, according to Metaphysics, is an acronym denoting “A Positive Existence Allowing Cultural Expressions of Ebony” – the Zimbabwean group shares with the Native Tongues collective the emphasis on a positive, Afrocentric message. This is further captured in Metaphysics’ response regarding the major influences on POE’s music:

I guess it was the vibe coming out of the Native Tongues from the USA – Arrested Development and the dashiki-wearing era of Hip-hop. It was like, wow, they’re trying to look like we look, they are proud to represent themselves as much as we could be proud to show them that we appreciate their efforts, so why don’t we just join the family and make it international? That was the energy behind it.

Yet, by adding a “From” to the “Native Tongue”, POE highlights that they are not simply imitating the style of their American compatriots, instead they position themselves as equal ‘family members’. Moreover, by emphasizing their place of origin, Africa, they lay their own claims of representing Hip Hop. This is illustrated in a couple of lines Metaphysics, who was known then as Quilla, spits in the song “From the Native Tongue”:

*Quilla spelt with a Q, I am here to record a style  
Hear the beats are going tribal tribal with a tribal vibe  
Coming from the motherland and I know it’s ethnic  
It’s my flavor coz that’s how I kept it  
[...]  
Though I don't comb my hair coz my dreads must be shaggy  
I wear jeans and they hang coz they baggy. (qtd. in Bere 92)*

By stating that he wears baggy jeans, the rapper indicates his affiliation to U.S. Hip-hop culture. However, he also differentiates himself by emphasizing his different socio-cultural background, he is “from the motherland”, a synonym denoting Africa, where the beats follow a different rhythm, infusing his rhymes with a different “style” and “flavor”. This lyric excerpt illustrates that POE, while clearly aligning themselves with a specific strand of U.S. Hip Hop, simultaneously explore, play with, and re-appropriate aspects of the culture into their own local experience and imagination.<sup>9</sup>

Shingirayi Sabeta aka Mau Mau, whose debut single “*Ndiani Mau Mau?*” (“Who is the Mau Mau?”) received generous airplay after its’ release in 1997, counts as another

<sup>9</sup> Despite their early successes, POE split up in the mid-90s. Yet, the artists – who embarked upon different music projects – have continued to influence and inspire the Zimbabwean Hip-hop scene with their music.

pioneer of Zimbabwean Hip Hop. According to Comrade Fatso, who describes Mau Mau's music as "conscious Shona rap," the artist's major contribution to Zimbabwean Hip Hop rests on the fact that he has made it acceptable to rap in Shona.<sup>10</sup> Whereas Biko Mutsaurwa aka Godobori reveres the artist for the depth of his lyrics: "[h]is self-aware, conscious and revolutionary lyrics pointed to a new positive path for Hiphop to take" (Mutsaurwa "Hiphop Kulture" 13). Indeed, Mau Mau's rhymes, as implied by choosing a name that is a direct reference to Kenya's anti-colonial struggle, are renowned for his politically-explicit messages that are steeped in black consciousness and Pan-Africanism. As Upmost states, "the rebellion in him woke up a lot of rebellion in me. I think the pan-African content in it. It made me think maybe I should stand for who I am. For who we are."

However, it was not until 2002 that the artist was able to compile and record his first album, "*Mfecane*", that epitomizes his artistic dexterity. Although the lyrics of the album – which range from domestic violence, the social inequalities of post-apartheid South Africa, the wars that ravage the continent, to the corruption of African leaders – do not directly deal with the socio-political situation in Zimbabwe, the harsh condemnation of African leaders in general, insinuates a critique of president Mugabe and his greed for power. In an Interlude, entitled "We are in a state of war", the Emcee proclaims:

We kicked the White man out and the Black men took power but what's really changed? Has anything really changed? Not anything, if anything things have gotten worse not better. Why? Because our Black leaders do have not the capability, they do not have the courage, they do not have the vision to lead Africa into a new, better millennium, because our Black leaders have become whores to the same love of money that the White master used to justify enslaving us, putting us in chains, putting us on the plantation and so now the very same Black leaders have become our new slave-masters.<sup>11</sup>

Zimbabwe's president can easily be included in this wholesale attack against black leaders, especially with regards to the country's political developments over the past decade. This excerpt resonates with a line Munetsi raps in his song "Live from Zimbabwe", released on the album *Ghetto Projects: From Day One* in 2006, "the second *Chimurenga*<sup>12</sup> did not really liberate us."

Hence, Underground Hiphoppers identify artists as pioneers of their scene, who utilize rap to voice ideological standpoints and socio-political concerns. While both, POE and Mau Mau, are 'keepin it real' – meaning in this context that they uphold Hip Hop culture – they also succeed, mainly through language use and lyrical content, to localize their music.

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<sup>10</sup> Personal interview, 8 March 2012. All other quotes of Comrade Fatso, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

<sup>11</sup> I have transcribed these lines from the English Version of the album, "Coup d'Etat", which was released by Mau Mau in the same year as the Shona album. I received soft copies of both of the albums from the artist himself.

<sup>12</sup> The second Chimurenga is a term that refers to Zimbabwe's war of liberation lasting from 1966 to 1980.

## The Localization of Pop Music: The Trajectory of Urban Grooves

The release of the compilation CD “Urban Grooves Vol.1” by Delani Makhhalima’s Galaxy Records in 2002 marks the official birth of Urban Grooves (Bere 116). Indeed, the producer is widely credited with coining the name, as well as the sound of this style of music, which is marked by an attempt to localize different mainstream Western pop music genres, including rap, by adding local instruments to a digitally-produced beat and by singing or rapping in Shona or Ndebele. Indeed, the major aim of the artists who assembled at Delani’s studio was to develop “a new thing”. As EX-Q, one of the pioneering Urban Groovers, states:

When we started Urban Grooves we started to use computers. We kind of take the word urban to separate ourselves from the sungura guys so that people would say this is a new thing, this is a new genre or something like that. Urban Grooves is an umbrella term for the new urban sound.<sup>13</sup>

David Chifunyise’s hit song, “*Tauya Naye*” (“We have come with her”), which was released on “The Future” – a compilation album produced by Delani in 2000 that counts as the direct precursor of “Urban Grooves Vol.1” (Bere 113) – is emblematic for the genre: the song, which is actually a rap rendition of a popular Shona wedding song, features the marimba, which accentuates a stark contrast to the (modern) beats that built the backdrop of the song (Veit-Wild 692).

However, the trajectory of the movement can be traced back to the late 1980s. Starting around that time, a number of young musicians, including Prince Tendai and Fortune Muparutsa, increasingly tampered with defining a distinct Zimbabwean urban pop sound by introducing digital-recording technology and by fusing different genres, such as soul, jazz, dancehall, r&b, and rap. Cindy, currently one of the most successful Urban Groovers, for instance, summarizes the origins of Urban Grooves as follows:

There were a couple of artists, years ago, like in the late 80s and the 90s, like Fortune Muparutsa and Prince Tendai, who are both late now, they used to sing an urban pop sound which was not very common here, because most people did the sungura, the jazz, and what have you. So those are the pioneers of Urban Grooves.<sup>14</sup>

Both artists, Fortune Muparutsa and Prince Tendai, dedicated their careers to developing a distinct Zimbabwean urban pop sound. While introducing ‘classic’ features of dancehall and rap, such as toasting, rapping and break-beats, Fortune Muparutsa simultaneously tried to add a unique local feel to his music, especially by singing in Shona (Bere 91).

Similarly Prince Tendai blended American pop with local elements. In order to mark the distinctive sound of his music, he even came up with a new term for it, ‘Barbed-

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<sup>13</sup> Personal interview, 13 March 2012. All other quotes of EX-Q, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

<sup>14</sup> Personal interview, 23 Feb. 2012. All further quotes of Cindy, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

Wire', which is regarded as Urban Grooves' predecessor: "[t]his genre of music called 'Barbed Wire' is exclusive to Prince Tendai and it is greatly believed that it is Prince Tendai's music which gave birth to what is known as Urban Grooves music today" (Zindi).

Prince Tendai has also shaped the culture, especially in terms of lifestyle, surrounding Urban Grooves. Thomas Deve, Chairperson of the Adjudication Committee of the Zimbabwe Music Awards (ZIMA), refers to the early Urban Groovers – David Chifuniyse and Plaxedes Wenyika amongst others – as the "Prince Tendai Generation":

Prince Tendai used to drive this big American car [...] and – like the Rusike Brothers, they were the ones who were shaping themselves after the Jackson family – they would speak in English, a certain type of English. They are from former Group A schools and Urban Groovers at one time or the other attracted kids from former Group A schools, you know, so you can actually see the trajectory. This is the background where they are coming from. So there is a trajectory, you can say, "this is the group." Then out of that group a certain consolidation happened, in terms of similar artists who came on board, the Chifuniyse's and so-forth, they are the ones who really pushed it. But it has a trajectory in terms of lifestyle and their understanding of local politics.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the majority of youngsters who would ultimately define Urban Grooves can be linked to Prince Tendai on the basis of education and class. This is further bolstered by Bere's observation that the artists who featured on "The Future" all share a similar background:

[a]ll artists on "The Future" project were young people still in school, college or university. Almost all of them came from middle class suburbs, and went to former whites-only schools. There is, thus, an element of class in early urban grooves (113).

The musician's penchant for the flashy American lifestyle, as indicated by his choice of car, as well as speaking a "certain type of English," are also distinguishing features of so-called *masalads* or *masalala* ("those who eat salad") – a term denoting a sub-group of urban youth culture many Urban Groovers, based upon their social class, manner of speaking, and fashion style, are part of. According to Veit-Wild, *masalala* are "[B]lack Zimbabwean youth from mostly well-to-do families, who imitate American hip-hop culture in dress, music taste, language and style of living [...]" (687). Yet, *masalala* espouse the materialistic and consumerist outlook of mainstream American rap culture, as portrayed by such artists as Jay-Z, Kanye West and 50 Cent. In one of the songs released on his album, "Team Hombe", Stunner, a famous Urban Groover who has been called Zimbabwe's "King of Bling" (Yikiniko), likens himself to American mainstream rapper Jay-Z, while comparing his compatriot EX-Q to LL Cool J: "Ex-(Q) *uri sei*. One rapper *wandichiri kubigger*. *Dai tiri kuAmerica uri Cool J, ndiri Jigga*"<sup>16</sup> (qtd. in Bwititi). Indeed, EX-Q became famous with a song celebrating *musalala* culture, entitled "Ndiri Musalala" ("I am

<sup>15</sup> Personal interview, 10 Feb. 2012. All further quotes of Deve, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

<sup>16</sup> "Ex-Q, how are you, the one rapper I give props to, if this was America you'd be [LL] Cool J and I would be Jigga [Jay-Z]."

Musalala"), in which he proudly proclaims that these youth reject the food, the music, and lifestyle associated with 'traditional' Zimbabwean culture and instead like to eat hamburgers, listen to rap, love to club and hang out in suburban malls.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Prince Tendai and Fortune Muparutsa were instrumental in conceptualizing Urban Grooves by establishing recording studios in the early 1990s. Zimbabwe's established record companies, Gramma Records, Zimbabwe Music Company (ZMC) and Records and Tape Promotions (RTP) were, and still are, unwilling to sign and promote artists who stray away from Zimbabwe's popular music genres – such as *sungura*, *museve*, and gospel – and experiment with creating a new urban pop sound by using digital technology (Eyre 38). Thus, the emergence of new studios, such as Muparutsa's Wheels of Fortune and Prince Tendai's High Density Records, provided a rare space for young artists – who adopted, adapted or fused genres such as soul, dancehall, r&b and rap – to record their music in the 1990s. As Deve states,

If you look at the trajectory of Zimbabwean music in terms of the recording contracts, you either played what they called pure traditional Shona music, which is *sungura*, and there were particular recording companies, which promoted and produced that [...]. Then you go to new studios, [...], this is where the Urban Groovers largely were entertained by Prince Tendai and the likes.

Fortune Muparutsa, for instance, aided in kick-starting the careers of a number of well-known Urban Groovers, including Alexio Kawara and Maskiri (Bere 110), while Mau Mau was one of the young artists who recorded their music at Prince Tendai's studio – his first single was produced by High Density Records (Mutsaurwa 12).

The collaboration between the emcee and the godfather of Urban Grooves indicates that there was no clear-cut separation between rappers, who subscribe to Hip Hop culture and are politically conscious, and other young musicians, who merely perceive rap as a pop music genre, used to entertain rather than educate. Indeed, all artists that turned to digital-music production and were influenced by the globally popular youth music genres of the time, regardless of their ideological standpoints, were confronted with the same reluctance of the music industry to produce, record, distribute, and air their music. As Biko Mutsaurwa states,

For everybody, not only for the Hiphop soldiers and warriors, people that are part of the culture and are aware of being part of it, but even for a rapper in general, or somebody that sang r&b, or somebody that was doing reggae or ragga, for those people to get airplay was difficult in the 90s in general because they would be perceived as producing inferior products to the American or Caribbean forms. [...] That's why most local music was [...] on the low.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, at the turn of the millennium, the music that eventually would become known as Urban Grooves embarked upon a triumphant conquest of the airwaves and established itself as a mainstream genre, while conscious Hip Hop music appeared to have vanished. As FlowChyld, an emcee and poetess, points out:

<sup>17</sup> The lyrics of "Ndiri Musalala" can be found on [www.dairio.com](http://www.dairio.com)

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview, 9 Feb. 2012. All further quotes of Biko, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

Hiphop in general it started in the 90s, with groups like POE, with Mau Mau. It was kind of cool cause these guys were kind of mainstream, but they were saying something. But then somehow in the late 90s it went down and there wasn't really any Hiphop going on in this country.<sup>19</sup>

What did happen was that the ZANU(PF) government, confronted with a fully-fledged economic and political crisis and the rise of a strong opposition movement in 2000, tightened state control over the airwaves and embarked upon a large-scale propaganda project, which also targeted urban youth music, including rap, in order to re-establish their hegemony.

### "The Future" Arrives: Urban Grooves Enters the Mainstream

In 2001, the government enacted the Broadcast Services Act (BSA) – one statute amongst many that were promulgated to tighten state control over media outlets since 2000 – which mandated a 75 per cent local content requirement (Hondura 7). Officially hailed as “a drive to try and protect Zimbabwean culture from Western influence,” this quota, which was the brainchild of then-Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, specifically targeted Power FM – the teen station which used to dedicate the vast bulk of its airtime to black Diaspora music – by forcing it to change its programming and turn into a platform for young, local artists (Zindi). This development, coupled with the introduction of state-sponsored music galas to which ‘government-friendly’ artists were invited to perform, kick-started the ascendancy of Urban Grooves. Pauline, former front woman of the Urban Grooves’ band M’Afrique, summarizes the tremendous impact the state’s policies had on the development of the movement:

When Moyo came through on the scene it was a slap in the face of a lot of people who said Urban Grooves would never make it. The local content quota was a big boost because people gave us an audience. We had the ears and eyes of the people. At last we didn't have to hustle anymore. This time was just amazing. This was a time when the national galas were starting, good money, good platform.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly Tererai, another female Urban Groover, states,

largely we were so big back then [in the early 2000s] because there is a Minister, Jonathan Moyo, who implemented the idea that our radio should play a 100 per cent local content, so it kind of forced people to hear us and I guess it shocked them into realizing, “wow, these guys are actually onto something”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Personal Interview, 16 Feb. 2012. Unless otherwise indicated, all consecutive quotes of FlowChyld refer to this interview.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview, 13 March 2012. All further quotes of Pauline, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

<sup>21</sup> Personal interview, 10 Feb. 2012. All further quotes of Tererai, unless otherwise indicated, refer to this interview.

Thus, on one hand, the content quota finally offered young artists' with a platform to air their music and present it to the larger public. However, on the other hand, the local content quota effectually tightened government control in the realm of urban youth music since it meant that only musicians who openly endorsed the state's ideology, or at least acquiesced to it by being apolitical, benefitted from its' sponsorship. Artists, who aim to spread a critical, socio-political message through their music – including Hip Hop heads who utilize the culture to speak out against oppression – did not benefit from the state's newfound interest in furthering local music production. On the contrary, their music was banned (cf. Eyre, Palmberg, Sibanda). Since the Zimbabwean Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), which largely enjoys a monopoly over the airwaves,<sup>22</sup> is nothing more than a mouthpiece of ZANU(PF), it is a cakewalk for the party to shape content in accordance with their interest (Eyre 34).

In fact Galaxy Record's top artists – the label's cream crop in Pauline's words – who featured on "Urban Grooves Vol.1" were also involved in government-sponsored projects (Bere 117). Plaxedes Wenyika, for instance, was part of the Ruvhuvhuto Sisters, who sung the tracks on Moyo's 2003 album "Come to Victoria Falls Down in Zimbabwe" (Sibanda 2004). Roy and Royce declined an invitation by the Media Institute for Southern African (MISA) to play at the Press Freedom Day on May 3, 2003, out of fear of losing government-sponsored opportunities (Palmberg 33). EX-Q, who was signed to Galaxy Records but did not feature on "Urban Grooves Vol.1", suggests a close link between Urban Grooves and the government by stating:

We did a theme song for Science and Technology, or something like that, for the Ministry, they were launching this project, called "Southern Technology," or something like that. So we had to do a theme song for the project and Delani made us do videos and stuff and we went everywhere the government wanted us to perform.

While not all Urban Groovers have directly lent their voice to support government projects, they have acquiesced to it by singing about love, or other frivolous subjects, in order to ensure airplay on radio – the main reason the music is commonly described as "bubble-gum."<sup>23</sup>

Moyo's dismissal at the end of 2004 had an impact on the fledgling Urban Grooves scene – not only was the local content quota overturned, but some Urban Grooves songs, officially because of their misogynistic content, but unofficially because of the movement's close link to Moyo, were banned from the airwaves (Nyamhangambiri). Notwithstanding, Urban Grooves songs have remained on the playlists of radio DJ's,

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<sup>22</sup> Recently, two privately owned radio stations, ZiFM Stereo and Star FM, received broadcasting licenses. However, these stations do not defy the party line. The owner of ZiFM Stereo, Supa Mandiwanzira, is a known ZANU(PF) functionary. In March 2013, Star FM indefinitely suspended a radio DJ for stating that Robert Mugabe's father was born in Malawi.

<sup>23</sup> That Urban Grooves is "bubble-gum music," because it focuses on entertainment and does not touch on conscious, socially relevant, or politically explicit topics has been stated by many people that I interviewed and talked to during my two research trips. An exception is the group Extra Large, who do comment on social issues such as the tedious relationship between landlords and tenants in some of their songs (Veit-Wild 689-690; Bere 169-174).

especially on Power FM. Deve poignantly captures the salience of the station as a platform for Urban Grooves in his remark: “[i]f Power FM would be shut today, Urban Grooves would die in this country.”

Moreover, with or without Moyo, music that is critical of ZANU(PF) continues to be banned from the airwaves (Sibanda 2008). Thus, Urban Groovers, in contrast to Underground emcees, stick to the general rule to refrain from any political topics in order to receive airplay. As Pauline notes with regards to the current music of her colleagues: “I find a lot of cheap lyrics going on. People don’t put much depth anymore. It is just about: Is it groovy? Can I move to it? Will it play on radio? How much money do I get?” While some Urban Groovers, such as EX-Q, claim that they are not interested in being political, others feel pressured into refraining from singing about certain topics in order to stay afloat in the music business. As one Urban Groover, who asked not to be identified, confided in an interview:

[p]olitics is making it hard for us. [...]. As an artist sometimes I want to sing and just say, every time I look out of my window I see poorly maintained roads and I see kids playing in dirty water they are going to get sick, or someone’s going to have an accident in that pothole. I want to say stuff like that but the minute you want to sing it, it’s like, so are you saying we do a bad job, so who do you think should do the job instead, who do you support? We must have a level of freedom of expression that has been stripped of us and it’s political. We do get limited in our self-expression to a great extend.

This quote indicates that young artists are very aware of what they can, or cannot, sing about, in order to reach the airwaves. Yet, if Urban Groovers do choose to introduce political statements into their lyrics, they come out in support of ZANU(PF).

Within a renewed frenzy of releasing propaganda songs in preparation for possible elections in 2010 (Sibanda 2010), Sanii Makhalima, Delani’s brother, stepped up as music producer, releasing the first album of the Urban Grooves outfit Born Free Crew, entitled “Get Connected”. The young musicians of the “Born Free Crew” situate themselves squarely within the ZANU(PF)’s hegemonic narrative by unabashedly celebrating Mugabe’s presidency on their first album. It is worth quoting a *Herald* article about the release of the album at length, since, in addition to providing a concise summary of the lyrics, it provides insight into the extent to which the state’s ideology is promoted by the young musicians as well as the state-sponsored press:

The album opens with the track Network, about the need for people to stay connected with their country as well as the leadership, with President Mugabe at the helm. “[...] VaMugabe ndevedu/Hatimbofa takavasiya” (We will never abandon President Mugabe), are part of the lyrics. The track Diaspora is based on a speech made by the President in which he was talking about how some Zimbabweans turned their back on their motherland to settle in foreign lands. Zviri Sei Sei? is about the enormous sacrifices and contribution that were made by our heroes in liberating the country. In it, the so-called “born frees” are actually acknowledging the role that these people played for them to be where they are today: “Nyika haina kuuya nepen nepaper, iropa remagamba/ usafunge kuti ndiri kunyepa” (the country was not won through pen and paper, but came with the sacrifice of the heroes). In Tshay’zandla (Rovai Maoko), His Excellency is celebrated and extolled. (Tera 2010)

The current Minister of Information, Webster Shamu, functioned as the executive producer of the group's second album, "*Nhaka Yedu/Our Heritage*," released in 2011. The president actually features on the song, "*Toita sei?*" (Tera 2011). Both of the two Born Free Crew's albums were embraced by the state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and have received massive airplay on radio and TV (Tera 2010, 2011).

#### "It's Bigger Than Hiphop"<sup>24</sup>: Defiant Voices From the Underground

While Urban Grooves moved center stage and conquered Power FM, a small group of emcees who espouse a very different definition and vision of Hip Hop assembled. In contrast to rappers that are affiliated with Urban Grooves, who are preoccupied in their lyrics with their *swagga*, money and fame – as exemplified by Stunner's hit song *Godó* ("Jealousy") in which he boasts about his talent, success and wealth: "*Tambirai kure* this is big boy business. *Tazoita Cash wangu haina kana weakness*"<sup>25</sup> – these emcees rap about the social ills, inequalities, and the repressive political climate that has befallen Zimbabwe. Yet, by refusing to give up their understanding of Hip Hop as a culture to uplift, inspire, and challenge the status quo, they simultaneously abandoned their chance to benefit from state sponsorship and receive airtime on the government-controlled media outlets. As Upmost describes the movement's status:

[i]t's a very quiet scene, unless you're involved in it, meaning it is not in the mainstream. You don't turn on the TV and see Hiphop and you don't turn on the radio and hear Hiphop. You have to know where to find it.

In Harare's Underground circles, Hip Hop is defined as a culture, a way of life that encompasses a universal set of values and is connected to a global Hip Hop community, which Alim defines as a "multilingual, multi-ethnic "nation" with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present" (3). For Synik, for instance, "Hiphop is Hiphop, a global movement, more than just rap, it's a culture. Hiphop for me is a voice; it's a way for me and countless others to express themselves." As implied by his statement, rap is only one element of Hiphop culture – which according to the Temple of Hiphop consists of nine elements: rapping, deejaying, graffiti art, break dancing, knowledge, language, hustling, and fashion<sup>26</sup>– and it is a voice, a powerful tool, that allows artists to express their viewpoints and to comment on their socio-political surroundings. Like 'conscious' rappers around the world, these emcees specifically stress the importance of 'knowledge of self', which Haupt describes as "the belief that you need to engage in a serious amount of critical introspection before you can make a meaningful contribution to your political and social context as an Hiphop artist, intellectual, or activist" (144).

24 This is a reference to Dead Prez's song, "Its bigger than Hiphop."

25 "Stay away, this is big boy business. We've made cash and it has no weakness."

26 In his song, "Nine Elements", KRS-One outlines the meaning of the nine elements in more detail.

According to Asante, “[a]lthough West African in its derivation, hip hop emerged in the Bronx in the mid-seventies as a form of aesthetic and sociopolitical rebellion against the flames of systemic oppression” (9) – and Zimbabwe’s Underground rappers are devoted to Hip Hop’s original vision as the voice of the marginalized and oppressed. As Outspoken raps: “I’m spittin’ cause oppression is a bitter cup we’re sippin’” (qtd. in McIlvaine). For Biko, Hip Hop is an acronym standing for “Her Infinite Power Helping Oppressed People” and is in its essence a revolutionary tool to undermine the status quo. The emcee’s vision of Hip Hop is reflected in his lyrics:

*I don’t battle emcees, I battle with the government  
kidnap the MPs and burn down the parliament  
My punch lines will overthrow the president  
I’m a bulldozer going through impediments.*

Yet, while not all rappers are equally radical and politically explicit – a factor that has led Upmost to conclude that the Zimbabwean Underground scene encompasses two types of revolutionaries: those who embrace Malcolm X’s “by any means necessary” attitude and others, like himself, who are rather inspired by Martin Luther King’s spiritual approach – all of the rappers I interviewed stress the importance to raise awareness by addressing social ills and inequalities and to generate positive change through their music. This is captured in FlowChyld’s explanation regarding the difference between Hip Hop and Urban Grooves:

Urban Grooves is Zimbabwean entertainers sort of trying to mimic the popular urban music from the West and bringing it to Zimbabwe. It’s more about entertainment, making people dance, having fun, sort of bubblegum music, really, whereas Hiphop is the very few people in the underground who are trying to push something that is more edgy. That’s saying something that is relevant. It’s less about entertaining than it is about educating, teaching, getting people to think, addressing social issues and stuff like that.

The strong emphasis on a conscious, socio-political message in the Underground scene is linked to the fact that it grew out of the “House of Hunger Poetry Slams”. Named after the first novella of Zimbabwe’s rebel writer, Dambudzo Marechera, the spoken word event was initiated in 2004 by the Hip Hop activist, Biko, the cultural activist, Comrade Fatso, and the poet and painter, Victor Mavedzenge at Harare’s Book Café – one of the few places in the country where a level of freedom of speech is maintained. The location, as well as the founders, fostered the growth of a group of young poets whose lyrics were radical, politically engaging and socially aware. After the poetry slams were running successfully for a about a year, Biko and others who are dedicated to Hip Hop as a revolutionary tool, started to host another slam, the “Toyitoyi Slams,” which specifically focused on promoting conscious Hip Hop. At the “Toyitoyi Slams,” like at the “House of Hunger Poetry Slams”, the importance of using art to inspire, protest, and educate was highlighted. As Biko remarks,

within the slam, we were clear about what we defined as Hiphop. If it was not socially-aware, if it was bling, we would discourage it. By doing so, we felt we were nurturing a deeper aspect of rap music, we were reclaiming rap music to Hiphop culture.

Biko, in fact, is a founding member of the *Toyitoyi* Artz Kollektive (TTAK), which is part of the Uhuru Network – an anarchist organization dedicated to the global struggle against all forms of capitalist oppression – the emcee established with other activists in 2004.<sup>27</sup> A group of emcees started to assemble around the TTAK, including The Ghetto Projects, a collective that has its roots in Chitungwiza and whose membership list includes C-tha-Real, Hot Fudge aka Righteous, The Shadow Master, Munetsi, and Mark Blaze, as well as Dialektric Blue that consists of the two Harare-based emcees, Outspoken and Upmost (“Ghetto Projects”). In line with the political underpinnings of Uhuru Network, the young rappers affiliated with TTAK increasingly defined Hip Hop as protest music with the key intention to challenge the status quo. As Biko states,

Within the [TTAK], we were beginning to understand Hiphop as a tool against oppression that might have manifested itself in the Bronx, but the spirit of resisting through culture, and even some of the elements, most of them we could trace back to our own African heritage.

The influence of the rappers that have been affiliated with TTAK since its early inception, on other artists is reflected in Synik’s statement regarding his first encounters with the scene:

A lot of the stuff that was going on was going on at Book Café and Mannenberg. I remember the thing that Biko hosted at that time [the Toyitoyi slams], I remember, well, I thought I can spit, I am cool, but after seeing Biko and Dialektric Blue kicking some mad rhymes, after that I had to go back to the lab, I had to re-evaluate myself. The dudes really challenged me.<sup>28</sup>

The TTAK, by producing community radio mixtapes and organizing events, such as the Republic of Pungwe Festival in July 2011 and the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan (AHC) that lasted from February to April 2013, offers much-needed alternative platforms to Zimbabwe’s conscious Hip Hop artists. In addition, the TTAK – in congruence with their perception of Hip Hop as an international countercultural movement – interlinks the struggle of the local Underground scene with the ones faced by ‘conscious’ Hip Hop activists from across Africa and abroad. The AHC, for instance, is a collaborative project of numerous grassroots Hip Hop collectives, including Soundz of the South (SOS) from Cape Town and Wasani Mtaani/Artists in the Hood from Nairobi. The key aim of the AHC, which is an annual event, is to strengthen the Underground Hiphop movement on the continent, as well as to establish links with like-minded artists and activists from all corners of the globe.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with Biko.

<sup>28</sup> The Mannenberg used to be a club, located across the Book Café and run by the same management team, before it moved from Five Avenue to Samora Machel Avenue at the beginning of 2012.

<sup>29</sup> For more information, see <http://www.facebook.com/AfrikanHiphopCaravan>

In 2007, Comrade Fatso, together with Outspoken and Upmost, established Magamba Network – a spoken word and Hip Hop organization, whose mission is, “to use arts and culture for social justice and democracy.”<sup>30</sup> By organizing monthly Hip Hop events – Mashoko and Peace in the Hood – the organization also offers a platform for emcees who due to their lyrical content are barred from reaching the airwaves. Hence, the network, albeit less radical than the TTAK, further strengthens the linkage between Harare’s Underground Hiphop scene, socio-political awareness and cultural resistance.

## Conclusion

The “Hip Hop Wars,” the clash between underground and mainstream Hip Hop that defines the U.S. scene, seem to be manifest in Zimbabwe as well (cf. Rose “Hip Hop Wars”). As I have argued, the Underground emcees’ ideological perception of Hip Hop differs vastly from the one adopted by rappers connected to Urban Grooves. Albeit artists from both movements have succeeded in tackling the challenges of localization, the rappers amongst the Urban Groovers make references to Jay-Z and LL Cool J and have adopted the misogynistic and materialistic outlook of American mainstream rap, while Underground emcees turn to so-called ‘conscious’ rappers, such as KRS-One and the Native Tongues Collective, as a source of inspiration and define Hip Hop as a counterculture that emphasizes ‘knowledge of self’ and speaks out against oppression.

Moreover, although the experience of Zimbabwe’s Underground emcees – mainly with regards to being barred from reaching the airwaves – is similar to the struggles Hip Hop heads are facing in other regions of the world, the meanings of the notions ‘mainstream’ and ‘underground’ in Zimbabwe are imbued with a different association, especially to the U.S. For one, the country’s music industry functions differently. The continued resistance of the country’s established record companies to produce anything but *sungura*, gospel, and *museve*, combined with the overall absence of major record labels, means that the vast majority of young artists are faced with the challenge of recording, distributing, and promoting their music independently. As Munetsi states in a personal interview, “in my perspective, almost everyone is Underground, because there is no Hiphop market to speak of in this place.”

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30 Personal interview with Comrade Fatso

Secondly, by stepping up as a promoter in the music scene at the beginning of the new millennium, by controlling the airwaves and by sponsoring some musicians, the state has incited a mainstream/underground dichotomy along political and ideological lines. Mainstream, in the Zimbabwean context, can thus be equated with receiving government support as well as plenty of airtime in the state-controlled media. Indeed, as I have shown, the emergence of Urban Grooves as a mainstream genre is intrinsically linked to the state's intensified propaganda efforts in order to defend against the threat of the rise of a strong opposition party and the economic crisis posed to their ruling hegemony at the turn of the century. The young artists that are connected to Urban Grooves have either benefitted from state sponsorship, regurgitated ZANU(PF)'s propaganda, or have refrained from any socially-relevant or politically-explicit topics in their lyrics. Underground Emcees in contrast, although some of them have managed to get one or two of their nonpolitical songs played on the radio, are largely shut out from the mainstream by refusing to reproduce state propaganda or being apolitical. On the contrary, they are upholding the original vision of Hip Hop as the voice of the oppressed. This close link between Hip Hop and political activism is strengthened by the two organizations – Uhuru Network and Magamba – that form the backbone of the scene.

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## The Influence of Hip Hop on Zimbabwe's Urban Culture

### Shingirayi Sabeta aka Mau Mau

Shingirayi Sabeta aka Mau Mau is one of the pioneers of Hip Hop in Zimbabwe. His debut single "Mau Mau" was released in 1997 and he followed his success with two albums, *Mfecane* (2001) and *Coup D'Etat* (2002). His early recordings defined Shona rap and was acclaimed for its politically conscious lyrics. Today, Shingirayi produces Gospel Hip Hop and his latest album appeared in 2010. The following piece is a transcription of his presentation at the Hiphop Symposium that took place at the University of Zimbabwe on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013, which is a personal reflection about the Zimbabwean Hip Hop scene, its beginnings in the 1980s and the directions it is currently taking.

We live in a world that is dominated and heavily influenced by one thing that none of us can escape: mass media.

If you live in a city or town in Zimbabwe it means that on a daily basis you will be exposed to what is going on globally through newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the computer and now - your mobile phone. So you effectively have the world on tap: just a click away. And just as Western culture as a whole filters to us here in Zimbabwe through mass media, so does the sub-culture of Hip Hop.

Most of us know Hip Hop as a type of music, a dance, a style of dress, a way of speaking, an attitude. These I would say are the most obvious indicators of the sub-culture. So just how much influence does the global phenomenon of Hip Hop have on Zimbabwe's urban youth?

Well, before I get into the NOW, let's go back to the beginning of Hip Hop .

Hip Hop was birthed in the mid 1970s in the US, and as a culture it first appeared in Zimbabwe around 1980, driven primarily by rap music, which was fresh, new and sounded like nothing else that had been heard before. I'm talking about "rapping", continuous, rhythmic rhyming over a syncopated beat, which was more often than not a "sample" of a mainstream song - The Sugar Hill Gang, for example, performing " A Rappers Delight" which sampled "Good times" by Chic - and scratching a record back and forth on a turntable to create new sounds. Imagine having grown up to Thomas Mapfumo's *Chimurenga* music, *sungura* music, church music - and now THIS?

Of course, with the music came the fashion, the attitude and the dance moves - for a kid growing up in 1983 in Zimbabwe, there was no escaping the break-dance craze: movies like "Beatstreet" showing on Kine 1 & 2 cinemas, and seeing Ollie and Jerry's "There's No stopping us" video on ZTV, "Sounds on Saturday" was all you needed to get you popping and breaking. There were b-boy dance crews with their boomboxes battling on the streets of Harare, spinning on their heads just like you saw them doing on the streets of New York. We knew what graffiti was, and appreciated it, even though most of us didn't live in inner city slums or ride the subway. So instead of tagging a wall, you did it on your book cover or your bookcase!

Despite being thousands of miles away from New York, nothing was more desirable to a Zimbabwean youth in the mid 1980s than a pair of fresh new Nike or Puma sneakers – that’s what we learned to call them – sneakers, not *takkies* from Bata – “*takkies*” was a played out, local, post-Rhodesian word. So if you had a cousin or uncle who could afford to fly to London or better yet, *lived there*, you were considered a higher form of life species by your peers, because you could get your people to hook you up with a pair of BLACK & WHITE shell-toe, Run-DMC Adidas high-tops! When our favourite rappers in the US rocked pushback hairstyles, we did too. When they had Jheri Curls... unfortunately, we did too. Well, some of us who are willing to admit it anyway! Whodini, LL Cool J, Dougie Fresh: enterprising local DJs were pumping their 12” mixes on radio and at the house parties. There was no escaping Hip Hop. Parents would just shake their heads in confusion and bewilderment: Why? *Cuz* “Parents just don’t understand”! Just as TIME magazine and mainstream media was predicting the death of Hip Hop in 1988, calling it a flash in the pan, not even music really, DJ Jazzy Jeff and Fresh Prince won the first ever Hip Hop Grammy. Wow! I was excited! And in Zimbabwe we were starting to get our own rappers, actually coming out and being played on radio: the Hitman Hosiah Sengende and even African pop singers like Themba Ndlovu had rap in their songs! Hip Hop was here to stay. Thank God.

As the 1990s rolled in, Hip Hop became focused on Afrocentricity: Afro and Black Americans became African-Americans: the child was returning to the mother, and the culture was openly embracing and celebrating its African heritage. There was Eric B & Rakim, A Tribe Called Quest and KRS One rocking black medallions and dashikis. Here in Zimbabwe we too re-learned to appreciate our African-ness - somehow we had lost it growing up in post-colonial Zimbabwe: just like our parents, we too were still caught up in the cultural schizophrenia that defines the modern African. It became cool to use your African name, and we in Africa felt more authentic than our cousins in the Diaspora – for once, WE were ahead of the curve. Hip Hop was about positivity, knowledge, wisdom, awareness, honesty and building the community. “Each One teach One” as the Nation of Islam taught. In Zimbabwe we had our very own Peaces of Ebony representing us. Once again we were a mirror of our counterparts across the seas.

But by the mid-1990s the tide was turning and Hip Hop was more aggressive, more gangster-oriented. Baggy jeans and Timberland boots, dungarees. We in Zimbabwe adjusted accordingly: urban youth could easily identify with the angry lyrics of Tupac Shakur – we saw an assault on black youth in the States as an assault on black youth worldwide, including ourselves. Then a young man called Sean Combs came and changed it all up: Hip Hop became more about style over substance, balling over consciousness. This was the dawn of the Bad Boy era that brought in the shiny suits, the diamond watches, the diamond earrings, Cristal bottle-poppin’ and the Bentleys, Beemers and Escalades. You would walk into Circus Night Club in Harare and see our own Puff Daddy, Foxy Brown, Lil Kim, Ja Rule Mini-Mes. Cornrows. Wife-beaters. Blasting hard-core Hip Hop out of your speakers with a “don’t give a F---” attitude”. Urban culture is always about belonging to something: once again, Hip Hop provided this global gang that you could be a part of. By the late 90s, a new word crept into the

lexicon: BLING! The word became so popular and mainstream it came to be personified with by rich, New York socialites like Paris Hilton, who was now also part of Hip Hop! That's how cool it became to be DOWN with Hip Hop.

A decade or two later, where are we? Hip Hop is still the dominant urban culture, and just as it dominates youth culture in America, it does so here in Zimbabwe. Hip Hop has become a multi-billion dollar juggernaut that is constantly re-inventing itself, because those that benefit from it cannot allow it to die. But I hardly recognize this animal at all: to me, it's become an empty shell, a ghost, a hardly recognizable shadow of its former self. It is now a highly commercialized money-making machine driven more by Hollywood than the hood. And the values it now represents reflect those of the greater beast behind it: capitalism. And capitalism eats its young, to borrow a phrase. You now have multi-tiered entertainment companies that own record companies that own prominent rappers who front as if they are independent and are in control of their own destinies, but they are not. The names of their cliques and record labels alone tell you what they are about: Young Money, Cash Money, Rockafella, Maybach. In Zimbabwe we have our own Tazoita Cash Records.<sup>1</sup>

If you listen and watch closely, you will see that MTV Base, Channel O, and our local radio stations pump and push a certain roster of Hip Hop artists only, a certain type of Hip Hop, in keeping with what the US charts dictate: whatever the American chart shows say is hot, then THAT is what is hot. So now the mostly sexual, misogynistic, material worshipping, egotistical and me-ism lyrics and attitudes of such rappers like Lil Wayne, Kanye West, 2 Chainz, Rick Ross and Nicki Minaj serve as the point-of-reference for today's Zimbabwean youth. And if that doesn't scare you, I don't know what does. There are some positive things going on in Hip Hop: rappers such as Talib Kweli, Immortal Technique and even gospel artists such as Da TRUTH and Lecrae, but you won't hear them on mainstream radio. They are largely kept underground. It's not lucrative enough, too niche, it doesn't sell, so you won't hear it. Consciousness and positivity are played out

The message coming through mainstream music videos, the lifestyles splashed out on fake reality TV shows, the magazines, on the iPod and smartphone headphones of our young boys and girls – and I'm talking from as young as 6 years old – to the twenty-something, is that it's ok to do whatever you gotta do to get yours; get paid by all means; get that Range Rover; get the minks; the Manolo Blaniks and Chanel; whatever your age have sex with who you want to, whenever you want to, there are no consequences; a real man gets any woman he wants; as many as he wants; a real WOMAN (a bad bitch) gets any man she wants; as many as she wants (just like a man); LOOK OUT for number ONE, look out for yourself only; EFF this and EFF that. And on local radio, our own rappers follow suit accordingly: the majority of what you hear are caricatures and shallow imitations of the latest, hottest American rapper, kids rhyming about stuff they don't even know about or have even seen, except maybe in a Jay-Z video. I've got friends with

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<sup>1</sup> Tazoita Cash is the record label of urban-grooves rapper Stunner and means 'We make Cash' Records (note by the editors).

teenage kids – and they tell me they are out of control, undisciplined, no respect for authority, their own African culture, or their elders.

Now is Hip Hop entirely to blame for this situation? OF COURSE NOT. But when you start to consider how much you and I are being exposed to today's' so-called Hip Hop culture on radio, on TV, magazine on your computer, on your smartphone in ONE SINGLE DAY, you start to appreciate the significance and influence that it has. And you have to ask: should Hip Hop be aiding and abetting the cultural destruction and corrosion of our youth, and allow itself to be PIMPED by the system? Is this the foundation Hip Hop was built upon? Are these the true values of the culture? ABSOLUTELY NOT!

Hip Hop grew out of a need for self-expression, for pride, for significance for urban youth worldwide. Hip Hop has never been a helpless VICTIM; Hip Hop has always been a FIGHTER, a FORCE THAT CREATES, BUT DOES NOT DESTROY. Hip Hop is influencing our youth this very minute, this very second. But its values have become perverted. And as such, it perverts whomever and whatever it touches. The question is, between those in the Americas, in Europe, in Asia, and us here in Africa: WHO WILL SAVE HIP HOP FROM ITSELF?

## Stunning the Nation: Representation of Zimbabwean Urban Youth Identity in Some Songs by Stunner

Pauline Mateveke

Pauline Mateveke is a lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, Department of English and Media studies. She holds a Masters in English and is currently studying towards a PhD in Arts. Her research interests include popular culture, gender studies and literature. In her article, which she presented at the Hiphop Conference in Harare on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013, she examines the impact local rap music has on identity construction of urban youth in Zimbabwe by analyzing songs of Stunner – a famous rap and Urban Grooves artist.

Hip Hop as a music genre has become one of the hottest sensations among youth, not only in America but the world over. Consequently it is necessary to attempt to define Hip Hop and to understand the historical influences surrounding its emergence. Hip Hop is defined as a culture and form of ground breaking music and self-expression, which consists of four basic elements: deejaying, emceeing, breakdancing and graffiti (Stavrias: 2005, Morgan and Bennett: 2011). Stavrias (2005) goes a little further to elucidate on these four basic elements of hip hop. He posits that deejaying is when the deejay creates hip hop's music by playing the break section of the record, cutting from one break to the next and matching the tempo to make a smooth transition that a crowd can dance to or an emcee can rhyme to. Breakdancing refers to the extremely physical dancing style that is danced to the beats of Hip Hop music. Emceeing is the method of vocal delivery of Hip Hop's music commonly known as rapping. Graffiti is the process of writing one's tag with a marker or spray paint on a wall in a public space and painting murals. Morgan and Bennett (2011) aptly capture these four basic elements of Hip Hop when they assert that Hip Hop,

“...is the distinctive graffiti lettering styles that have materialised on walls worldwide. It is the latest dance moves that young people perform on streets and dirt roads. It is the bass beats and styles of dress at dance clubs. It is local MCs on microphones with hands raised and moving to the beat as they shout out to their crews” (1).

From these insights one gathers that Hip Hop does not simply refer to the music developed by African-American youth, it refers to the music as well as the arts, media and cultural movement and community developed by black American youth. Levy (2001) acknowledges these basic elements of Hip Hop but goes further to assert that Hip Hop is,

“a global subculture that has entered people's lives and [has] become a universal practice among the youth the world over. From a local fad among black youths in the Bronx, it has gone to become a global practice, giving new parameters of meaning to otherwise locally and nationally diverse identities.”(134)

Central to Levy's explanation is the contention that it would be simplistic for one to consider Hip Hop merely as a music genre, it is in fact a way of life. It refers to the aesthetic, social, intellectual and political identities, beliefs, behaviours and values produced and embraced by its members (Morgan and Bennett: 2011). Stavrias (2005) concurs with Morgan and Bennett when he maintains that Hip Hop is more than a style of music, it is a youth lifestyle that has evolved from its humble beginnings in the Bronx in the early 70s into a cultural and economic phenomenon of global proportions. Taking Levy, Stavrias and Morgan and Bennett's insights as points of reference, one is led to the understanding that Hip Hop has become a force to be reckoned with, because it has cultural associations that cannot be overlooked.

Another important dimension to Hip Hop is the fact that it is predominantly immersed in youth activity and is emblematic of the black populace. This is an important dimension because "youth" and "black race" are illustrative of subalternity. Being a youth is associated with immaturity, deficiency, vulnerability, neglect and deprivation (Munichie: 2004), while being a black person reflects a painful history of oppression and dehumanisation by imperialist forces. This means that through Hip Hop the subaltern has found another artistic way of expressing themselves, and Hip Hop has become another mode through which the subaltern can be understood.

Taking the debate from the argument that Hip Hop is a genre of the subaltern it becomes necessary to gain some insight into the socio-political milieu surrounding the development of Hip Hop. There are debates surrounding the origins of Hip Hop with some scholars arguing that Hip Hop has its roots in the West African diasporic art form of the griot (Keys: 2002). Nonetheless, the general consensus is that Hip Hop began to be noticed as a music genre in the Bronx between the 1960s and 1970s (Baxter and Marina: 2008, Stavrias: 2005, Levy: 2001). Hip Hop was constructed around the anger and frustration experienced by African American youth because the society within which they existed could not bear their presence and so the African American had to live at the margins of that society (Gladney: 1995, Gayle: 1971). West (1990) notes that Hip Hop was a musical expression of the paradoxical cry of desperation and celebration of the black underclass and poor working class. Hip Hop openly acknowledged and confronted the wave of personal cold heartedness, criminal cruelty and existential hopelessness in the black ghettos of America. Therefore, Hip Hop was created with an implicitly resistant dimension to it. It was a challenge to the hypocrisy of American democracy that purported that the African-American was a free citizen and yet the reality was that the African-American was still weighed down by poverty and racial injustices. Hip Hop was thus used as an artistic expression that was designed to cope with urban frustrations and conditions.

To understand Hip Hop only in terms of resistance and frustration is tantamount to doing this dynamic art form a grave injustice. It is true that Hip Hop expressed the urban impoverished experience of the African-American, but Hip Hop surpassed these feelings of frustration and resistance. It was also a visible, though oftentimes controversial, celebration of the African-American identity. After years of being objectified and being treated as second class citizens Hip Hop became another way of the

African-American to assert their presence and their humanity. The devil may care attitude that is often synonymous with Hip Hop reflects the necessity to unapologetically embrace one's humanity despite the overarching limitations. Tricia Rose (1994) confirms this paradigm of Hip Hop moving beyond mere resistance when she argues that Hip Hop provides young black people with an alternative path to identity and social status. More space is required to deconstruct the underlying forces behind the controversies associated with Hip Hop but this study posits that the black American youth felt alienated from and hostile to their impoverished condition. Consequently this alienation and hostility sometimes manifested in their music.

The foregoing discussion was an attempt to define Hip Hop and to establish the historical and political milieu surrounding its development. It is important, however to situate Hip Hop within the African framework because this paper's focus is on African Hip Hop. The subsequent discussion is therefore an attempt to trace the emergence of Hip Hop in Africa and to illustrate how Hip Hop in Africa has influenced our everyday socio-economic and political involvements.

### Contextualising Hip Hop in Africa

From the black underclass in the ghettos of America, Hip Hop rose to accomplish remarkable economic success and cultural impact. Accordingly youth from around the world began not only to consume Hip Hop music but they also began to produce their own Hip Hop cultural forms. In Africa, Hip Hop arrived between the 1980s and early 1990s. For instance rappers such as Senegal's MC Linda, MC Solar and Positive Black Soul pioneered Hip Hop in Africa. Since then Hip Hop has spread with the vigour and passion of a cultural revolution ([www.allafrica.com/stories/200710011449.html](http://www.allafrica.com/stories/200710011449.html)). According to their website, All Africa new argues that the emergence of Hip Hop in Africa was intrinsically an imitation of African-American Hip Hop as African artists simply reproduced the music, dancing, art and clothing coming out of the African-American Hip Hop scene. Like African-American Hip Hop artists, African Hip Hop artists also told stories of poverty, crime, violence and corruption ([www.allafrica.com/stories/200710011449.html](http://www.allafrica.com/stories/200710011449.html)). Consequently, when Hip Hop came to Africa it was received with suspicion as there were questions pertaining to its originality and Africanness. There was also scepticism relating to hip hop's influence on African youth. African-American Hip Hop was economically successful but it was laden with a lot of controversies. Negative views were attached to the genre and its practitioners, such as Public Enemy, did not make any efforts to shy away from the bad boy image attached to them. The "in your face" attitude synonymous with Hip Hop practitioners left a bad taste in mainstream American culture. Thus, it is these negative associations with Hip Hop that resulted in it being received with distrust in Africa. It was common to associate Hip Hop with moral bankruptcy and to identify it as an agent of American cultural imperialism (Stavrias: 2005). In the African context music has always played a crucial role in shaping and influencing societies in a positive way, art for art's sake is commonly frowned upon in African circles because art should be functional, collective and

committed. Thus, if African Hip Hop had to be accepted in Africa, it somehow had to discover a way of transcending its mimesis of African-American Hip Hop and to come up with a Hip Hop that tells the African story and reflects the African's everyday lived experiences.

Because Hip Hop had its roots in an African diaspora art form, its presence in Africa raised questions about origins and homecomings (Morgan and Bennett: 2011), consequently, Hip Hop in Africa overcame its mimesis stage of development as a result of the artists' sense of cultural authority. Hip Hop in Africa has been redefined to the extent that it can be labeled "glocal." "Glocalisation" refers to one's ability to simultaneously engage in the intersections of global and local dynamics (Morgan and Bennett: 2011). African Hip Hop artists have had to engage in these global and local intersections in the production of their music. Hence they typically developed their own styles drawing from local and cultural art forms and addressing the social and political issues that affected their communities and nations. Nonku Vundla's aka Blackbird "Prayer for Somalia" glaringly demonstrates this dynamic. In the song, one can hear the Hip Hop beat that is synonymous with female rappers such as Nicki Minaj, but Vundla infuses her lyrics with Shona. Moreover, typical of African art forms, the song has a purpose which is to address concerns of hunger and poverty in Somalia. This shows that African Hip Hop is simultaneously loyal to and distinct from its American origins (Dominello: 2008).

African Hip Hop has not only been entangled in the socio-economic issues of the day, there are cases when Hip Hop has been used to address political issues as well. Because Hip Hop is predominantly a youth activity, governments have not missed the political potential of a youth movement that could be encouraged by supporting Hip Hop artists. Manase (2009) aptly demonstrates this point in his analysis of Zimbabwean urban grooves. Zimbabwean "urban grooves" is an umbrella term that refers to Zimbabwean musical outfits that gained prominence during the post 2000 decade. The urban grooves draw from Western hip hop, rhythm and blues and raga beats and it is from this movement that Zimbabwean Hip Hop stars such as Stunner, were born. Manase (2009) shows how the emerging Zimbabwean Hip Hop artists such as Stunner, Ex Q and Maskiri infused Shona lyrics in their music as a performance practice that affirmed government expectations that artists sing in local languages. As a result of this, artists have had to negotiate between the need to remain authentic yet at the same time affirm the state's expectations that artists refer to local social experiences, history and culture (Manase: 2009). Manase's study aptly demonstrates how African Hip Hop has been politicised to serve state interests but studies have also shown that African Hip Hop has been used to oppose the state as well. Morgan and Bennett (2011) provide a classic example of how African Hip Hop has been actively entangled in political issues when they refer to Master Mimz a Moroccan female MC, who openly supported the Egyptian revolution that eventually led to the resignation of Mubarak by releasing the song "Back down Mubarak". This exemplifies how Hip Hop can be used to defy and challenge autocratic governments.

From the preceding discussion it is noticeable that African Hip Hop is not all about “I shot your mum...fuck your dad...” or about “bling...niggaz...bitches and hos” (Bere: 2008). In fact, African Hip Hop attempts to be grounded in firm African principles and to stray away from the stereotypical negative images cultivated by African American icons such as Tupac. African Hip Hop actively engages with societal issues and “...engages and integrates innovative practices of artistic expression, knowledge production, social identification and political mobilisation” (Morgan and Bennett: 2011). This paper attempts to assess the representations of Zimbabwean urban youth identity in selected songs by Stunner, to achieve this it is necessary to contextualise Hip Hop in Zimbabwe so as to understand the socio-economic and political influences surrounding its emergence. Accordingly the ensuing discussion traces the emergence of Hip Hop in the Zimbabwean context.

#### The Zimbabwean Hip Hop scene

There is not much scholarly engagement on when exactly Hip Hop rose to significance in Zimbabwe. However the general consensus is that Zimbabwean Hip Hop gained significant recognition in the early 1990s. Like earlier forms of Hip Hop in Africa, Zimbabwean Hip Hop was cripplingly influenced by American Hip Hop traditions and it lacked originality. Early practitioners of Zimbabwean Hip Hop simply replicated American Hip Hop and Bere (2008) refers to this kind of music as “world beat”. It was a performance of renditions of what Bere (2008) refers to as world beat hip hop. According to Bere, world beat Hip Hop is that which merely imitates and reproduces US mainstream Hip Hop culture without being incorporated into the local body of music.

Present-day Zimbabwean Hip Hop has made huge strides towards redefining a sound that is recognised as “local beat”. Bere defines “local beat” as the incorporation of “world beat” sounds into the local body of music. As a result of the need to account for local traditions of art and culture, Zimbabwean Hip Hop artists infuse their music with local Shona or Ndebele lyrics as well as traditional musical instruments such as “mbira”. Synik’s “Sin City” is one good example of an artist’s attempt to adopt Hip Hop so that it represents local art forms. The song’s mixture of some typical Hip Hop beats and the “mbira” sound in the background encapsulates the artist’s quest to remain an authentic Zimbabwean artist. The adoption of local languages in Zimbabwean Hip Hop is a very important dimension that needs to be elucidated. There is a reciprocal relationship between language and culture as they both reinforce each other. Every culture has a language that best expresses it and so the use of local languages in Hip Hop songs represents the need to develop local cultures so as to inform, and showcase the African worldview, norms and complications. Against the background of Eurocentric notions of Africans as a people without a culture, the infusion of native languages in Hip Hop is important in correcting the misinformation about Africa.

Williams (2007) argues that Hip Hop culture has been a space where the youth of today have found identity, humanity and a place to develop their critical consciousness through the engagement of humanising discourse such as art, music and dance and other creative expression. This has been true to the Zimbabwean situation as Hip Hop has created agency for Zimbabwean youth. Hip Hop shows, such as “Mashoko and the

Circle” have made strides towards elevating Hip Hop in Zimbabwe. Such shows also reflect the collectivism that is synonymous with African artistic expressions. Coming from a country that has experienced a debilitating socio-economic and political crisis, Zimbabwean Hip Hop easily articulates refreshing and interesting perspectives on the Zimbabwean crisis. It is vibrant and has the potential to raise awareness. However, like its American counterpart, Zimbabwean Hip Hop has also been accused of being a negative influence on youth culture and identity (Nyasha: 2008, Kapamwe: 2008). Zimbabwean Hip Hop has been condemned on the basis of violent and misogynistic lyrics (Chari: 2008). This paper however will not fall into the trap of rushing to view Hip Hop as a bad influence on youth identity. The paper chooses to analyse selected songs by Zimbabwean MC Stunner, a typical bad boy in the Zimbabwean Hip Hop circles. Most of his songs reflect the patriarchy, misogyny and materialism that is common to hip hop. In 2011, Stunner was involved in a sex tape scandal between him and girlfriend Pokello Nare which viral on the internet and did not cover him in glory, instead it validated his bad boy status. By zeroing on this typical “bad boy”, the paper questions the normative overtones of Hip Hop and youth identity. The paper argues that the prescribed standard of stereotyping Hip Hop as a negative force around the youth masks the music’s potential to deliver socially relevant material.

#### Methods of Research

Because this paper aims to stray away from the normative conclusions of regarding Hip Hop as negatively representing and influencing youth identity, the researcher had to make strategic choices in the research methodology. Therefore, purposive sampling was used in selecting the music that could reflect the study’s objectives. Purposive sampling is a method in which a sample is deliberately chosen due to the qualities it possesses (Tongco: 2007). Since the researcher has decided on the information that needs to be known, purposive sampling is ideal as it enables the researcher to select material that reflects this information. Purposive sampling is without its faults, it has been heavily criticised on being biased but this study argues that “the inherent bias of the method contributes to its efficiency” (Tongco: 2007). The selected songs were subjected to discourse analysis so as to interpret the underlying social structures which may be assumed or played out in the songs.

#### Theoretical Framework

Zimbabwean Hip Hop is a post-colonial activity and so this study is informed by post-colonialism as a theoretical inquiry into the representations of urban youth identity in Hip Hop music. Definitions of post-colonialism are not conclusive but the general agreement is that post-colonialism ascertains a trial of societies emerging from the experience of colonialism (McFadden: 2002, Bhabha: 1994). Mbembe (1992) posits that the post-colonial present is complex and contradictory and its subjects have had to have a marked ability to manage not just a single identity but several which are flexible enough to negotiate as and when required. Bhabha (1994) takes Mbembe’s insights further by insisting that the postcolonial world should valorise spaces of mixing, spaces where truth and authenticity move aside for ambiguity. Considering the oppositional and conflicting forces surrounding African youth identity and African hip hop, the post-colonial theory

becomes relevant to this study as it would capture the "...hybrid inadequacies of [Hip Hop and the youth's] post-coloniality (Gandhi: 1998). The postcolonial concern with cultural diversity appeals to this study because it allows the study to move away from common suppositions around the influence of Hip Hop on youth identity.

### Stunner's Representation of Zimbabwean Urban Youth Identity

An analysis of Stunner's selected songs points to five related themes:

#### **Stunner's Representation of Young Urban Women**

Hip Hop has been criticised for its patriarchal and misogynistic lyrics and an analysis of some songs by Stunner validates this criticism. The image of young women as materialist is a primary image in most of his songs. In "Live your life", Stunner revels in his rise to fame and fortune and this augmentation results in "*vasikana vandaimbopresser nhasi vaakundisona* (the girls that I used to pursue now chase after me)"<sup>1</sup>. Stunner fashions a discourse in which women are categorized as parasites, whose main inspiration is material achievement. He insinuates that young women are phoney and incapable of genuine love, and that all they care about is money and living a life of luxury. "Team hombe" reiterates Stunner's indications when he sings:

From city to city	From city to city
Told you Stunner's got spouses	I told you Stunner has got spouses
That's why <i>mababie hobho</i>	That's why a lot of girls
<i>Arikuda kundibvisa matrouusers.</i>	Would like to take off my pants

These kinds of lyrics encourage dominant cultural narratives that stereotype women as trivial. Chari (2008) reasons that negative lyrics about women have the potential to create pretexts for the escalation of violence and sexual exploitation of women.

Stunner's songs also objectify women: he portrays women as sex objects. In the song "Body", Stunner is enamoured with his lover's stimulating body. In the song, there is no regard for other facets of a woman's identity that can be appealing to a man. Aspects such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, etc. are not regarded by so doing, Stunner's song contributes to a negative understanding of what it means to be a woman. "*Musikana chidhakwa*" (That girl is an alcoholic) is an attempt to construct and define what it means to be an ideal woman. According to the song, consuming alcohol incapacitates a woman's potential to be "ideal" or as Stunner puts it "ladylike". The song ultimately aims to pacify women because the act of consuming alcohol is usually mostly done in public places such as pubs, clubs or beer halls, places that are considered men's terrain. Considering that a significant number of young women in Zimbabwe consume alcohol, this song is demeaning and has the potential to play havoc with their sense of identity.

A lot can be said on Stunner's representation of young women in urban Zimbabwe but for the purposes of not being redundant, this study will not delve further into the

<sup>1</sup> All translations have been done by the author.

subject. The study does not excuse these representations but instead encourages critical thinking and advocates for a balanced argument concerning the way Stunner has represented young women's identity in Zimbabwe. Williams (2007) maintains that Hip Hop is intimately and inextricably linked to societal influences. By virtue of being a young man in an unambiguously patriarchal society, Stunner cannot escape the influences of patriarchy that shape feminine and masculine identities. If Stunner sounds patriarchal and oppressive to women it is because he is a man of his times and is not independent from his culture. The solution lies in a transformation of masculine and feminine identities that shape our existence.

### Urban Youth and the Acquisition of Wealth

A superficial analysis of Stunner's songs would easily lead to the conclusion that he represents Zimbabwean urban youth as materialistic and heavily concerned with amassing wealth. These conclusions would be understandable because Stunner's lyrics openly celebrate materialism and capitalism. In "*Team hombe*" he sings:

<i>"Makushamiswa ndaita mari zvakare</i>	You are surprised that I have made money
<i>Asi ndimi maimboti magitare haabhadhare.</i>	Yet you thought music doesn't pay.
...I am now a grown man	...I am now a grown man
Doing grown man things	doing grown man things
<i>Ndakutora vasikana venyu</i>	I am taking your girlfriends
<i>CD rangu muchitenga</i>	Still you buy my CD
<i>...Zvinhu zvisina mari</i>	...Anything that does not make money
Please return to sender.	Please return to sender.

The song "*Godo*" also repeats Stunner's position on the acquisition of wealth. In the song he refers to making money as "big boy business" and the video features Stunner riding in fancy and expensive cars, wearing fancy and expensive brands of clothes and "bling" or gold chains

To conclude that Stunner represents urban youth as driven by self-indulgence runs the risk of masking the socio-economic factors surrounding these lyrics. Stunner's depiction of urban youth and the acquisition of wealth can also be studied from the position that wealth in this case is synonymous with visibility. Coming from a context in which Zimbabwe was facing the crippling socio-economic and political crisis of the previous decade, youth vulnerability was intensified. The economic crisis pulled youth further into the abyss of invisibility and subordination. Youth were trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and they constituted the highest rates of unemployment (The National Youth Council: 2000). The preoccupation with material gain in Stunner's songs captures this "dog eat dog" era and represents the youths' preoccupation with survival and bread and butter issues.

Stunner's youth do not accept their fate without a fight, instead they are active and they "hustle" so that they can realise the improvement of their condition. Most Hip Hop artists hail from the high density suburbs, places that are not fully developed and were hit the hardest by the economic crisis. Thus the need for money that Stunner captures in his

songs represents the youth's need to transcend their subordination. Stunner juxtaposes the ability to make a lot of money with "doing grown man things or Big business", this clearly demonstrates that youth who hunger to make money long to rise above their inferior position.

### **Urban Youth and Alcohol Use**

Some songs by Stunner make reference to Zimbabwean urban youth's consumption of alcohol. As discussed before Stunner seems to discourage alcohol intake by women and regards women who drink alcohol as imperfect. Interestingly, Stunner seems to glamourize the consumption of alcohol by young men, such as himself. In his songs, the consumption of alcohol is juxtaposed with one's economic success. For example, in "Live your life" he refers to a situation in which he's holding an alcoholic drink in one, a young woman in the other and in a third, symbolic hand, he is holding some cash. He sings: "*Ndakabata gas uku, ndakabata moko uku inini ruoko rwechi three ndakabata cash*". There is a suggestion that success and wealth are determinants of one's ability to consume alcohol. Noteworthy is the fact that the alcohol being referred to is not any kind of alcohol but the expensive brand. Thus, in "*Team hombe*" Stunner celebrates his rise to fortune and fame which has resulted in a shift "*From hwahwa hunodhaka takumwa hunonaka,*" which basically refers to a shift from cheap brands of alcohol to expensive ones.

It would be easy to criticise Stunner's representation of urban youth and alcohol use especially taking into cognisance the negative health implications of alcohol use. In Africa, the role of the artist is to heal society through his/her artistic expressions. Art should rectify society by pointing it in the right direction and the valorisation of alcohol inherent in Stunner's music betrays the role of the artist. This study recognises the importance of rebuilding societies through art but argues that the representation of alcohol use by Stunner can also be viewed in terms of it being an important identity statement that needs further deliberation. Stunner is giving alcohol a special status for communicating youth identity. Because alcohol is an indicator for success, it becomes a prop for staging the self in a performance of development. So for the youth alcohol consumption is sort of cool as it relates to and identifies with accomplishment.

### **Urban Youth and the Celebration of Neighbourhood and Nation**

Global Hip Hop culture is almost always about the celebration of roots in place, neighbourhood, home, family and nation (Mitchell: 1999). This celebration of roots is aptly depicted in some of Stunner's songs. The attachment to one's neighbourhood is closely linked to the deep seated yearning to fit in or to belong. In his songs Stunner makes use of local idioms and urban lingo that is common to Zimbabwean urban youth, this use of slang and urban lingo is a way of celebrating one's nationality. The song "Zimbabwe" shows the pride that one has in being Zimbabwean and in the song, Stunner openly calls for the youth to get involved in nation building. "*Mdara Banda*" also displays youths who are actively involved in the issues that affect their everyday lives. In the video we are presented with a group of youth in one of the high density suburbs of Harare who alert Mrs. Banda of her husband's sexual escapades with another woman. The youth join Mrs. Banda in confronting and shaming her husband and girlfriend. Although the video

is comic and playful, Stunner satirises the disease that has confronted contemporary Zimbabwe popularly known as “having a small house”. Small houses are women who usually have long term affairs with married man. Given the background of HIV/AIDS which has taken a toll on millions of Zimbabwean lives, the song becomes relevant as it shows that youth will not sit back while this disease ravages society. In “*Harare*”, Stunner remains true to his society by portraying a realistic picture of life in Harare. Stavrias (2005) reasons that a hip hopper’s identity is partially defined by representing where they are from. In the song, Stunner captures the commitment of urban youth to survival so much that they “do not sleep” looking for ways of improving their condition. However Stunner does not idealise his neighbourhood, instead he shows that urban youth’s commitment to survival manifests in different ways and the strategies they use can both be progressive or aggressive. The song depicts youth in Harare who may resort to stealing and backstabbing in their quest for survival.

Noteworthy is the fact that the Zimbabwe that Stunner depicts in his songs might be a nation weighed down with socio-economic and political issues but it is far from the standard prescriptions of global media that represent Zimbabwe as nothing but a violent, diseased and impoverished basket case. The Zimbabwe that he portrays is committed to rebuilding itself and its youth are active participants in recreating a better nation.

#### **Urban Youth, Hybridity and Multiplicity**

Nyanga et al (2011) posit that Zimbabwean youth identity is not homogenous, but there are multiple youth identities that are influenced by varied factors. A study of Stunner’s representation of urban youth identity validates this point, the youths that he represents arise from multiplicity and dispersion (Mbembe: 1992). Because youth identity arises from multiplicity and dispersion it cannot help but be complex and contradictory. A comparison of the songs “*Rudo rwemari*” and “*Team hombe*” displays this fragmented consciousness that inheres in urban youth. In “*Rudo rwemari*” Stunner adopts a moralistic position that denounces and rejects a life that is driven by the love of money. However “*Team hombe*” echoes a conflicting tune as it openly embraces materialism and the culture of consuming. This dichotomy retells Mbembe’s assumptions that the postcolonial present must valorise spaces of mixing, spaces where truth and authenticity move aside for ambiguity. Stunner and the youths that he represents are ultimately products of their time, they are post-colonial subjects and who suffer from what Gandhi (1998) refers to as post-colonial schizophrenia.

In the song “*Godo*” Stunner also demonstrates this split personality. He asks the question “*Chii chiri better life or hupenyu?*” (What is better ‘life’ or ‘hupenyu’). His position is that “Life” is better than “hupenyu” because although the two words mean the same thing, “life” has to be better as it signifies the civilisation and development of the English world while “hupenyu” is not preferable due to its ties to the backwardness of the Shona world. This contradiction is best explained by what Prakash (1995) regards as the enduring colonial hierarchies of the orient and the occident, the coloniser and the colonised, the civilised and primitive, the developed and developing. Stunner aptly shows the consequences of these colonial hierarchies by revealing urban youth who are negatively affected by cultural imperialism which dictates the superiority of the West.

The song “*Hameno*” however confirms Stunner’s conflicting ideology, in the song he questions why black people have a low self-esteem and prefer Western values, why they prefer to speak in foreign languages instead of upholding their indigenous languages. This conflicting ideology in the artist represents the oppositional and conflicting forces around the construction of urban youth identity. Youth are shaped by global and local influences and it is a challenge to try and honour both without ambiguity. Hip Hop emerges from complex cultural exchanges and larger social and political conditions of disillusionment and alienation (Williams: 2007), and within these complexities identities are never unified instead they become increasingly fragmented and fractured (Hall: 1997). The urban youth that Stunner represents arise from different, often intersecting, and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. Hip Hop as a youth movement is an important site for understanding youth who are under its influence. Stunner’s music therefore reveals that Zimbabwean urban youth identity is complex and diverse and his music ultimately matches the intensity of these urban youth’s lives.

## Conclusion

The study analysed the representation of urban youth identity in selected songs by Stunner. The study reasons that there is a tendency to easily condemn Hip Hop as a negative influence on youth identity and the study appreciates the reasons for this criticism. However the paper has shown that there is need for reconsidering these basic conclusions about Hip Hop and youth identity because to disregard Hip Hop completely would be tantamount to masking a complex array of cultural forms and practices within Hip Hop. Morgan and Bennett (2011) argue that nations are using Hip Hop to see, hear, understand, serve and ultimately be transformed for the better by the brilliant and powerful young people. Thus Hip Hop can be a progressive force as it provides an important site for understanding youth, and hopefully to come up with solutions to better their condition.

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## The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan: Building a Revolutionary Counterculture

Biko Mutsaurwa

Biko Mutsaurwa is a leading Shona poet, Hip Hop artist and community activist. He is the founder of UHURU Network, an educational trust that uses cultural activism and popular education to advance the struggle for freedom of expression and social justice in Zimbabwe. He is also one of the initiators of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan. In this article, he provides a brief outline of the lessons to be learned from a decade of Hip Hop activism on the African continent. In addition to providing a short historical overview of the roots of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan, he outlines the vision of the project: the creation of a coherent Afrikan Hiphop Movement based upon a strategic orientation towards social movements of the working class and the oppressed.

### A Brief History: Building Counterculture

Over the last decade the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan has been building connections across borders on the continent and beyond. Yet few people, even some in Afrikan Hiphop circles, have a good grasp of the beliefs, motivations and purposes behind this Movement. Often times with an emerging Movement, it is not until the time hatches – producing concrete and visible results – that people begin to give it a name and tell its’ story. Thus, in the following paragraphs, I will trace the origins and aims of the project.

In 2004, an affinity group of student activists, Hip Hop activists and socialists established Uhuru Network, based in Harare, as a decentralised platform where members of the Toyitoyi Arts Collective, Imani Media Collective, Impilo Permaculture Collective and Ruzivo Study Circle met and forged theoretical and tactical unity. As a social movement, emerging from the concrete struggles of working people in Zimbabwe against the Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAPs) of the ZANU-PF dictatorship, the Network was from the start decidedly anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarianist. The organisation actively participated in actions for social and economic justice within the social movements. Students had a campaign against the privatisation of education; trade unionists were constantly on strike demanding a living wage; the communities were being ravaged by HIV/Aids, hunger and poverty; and young unemployed people in working class communities were rioting. The economy spiraled out of control, whilst the police filled prisons with tortured dissidents. Under these conditions, the Toyitoyi Arts Collective embarked on a path of Hip Hop Activism: one that was oriented towards active participation in the social movements of the working-class.

It was clear then, as it is now, that Hip Hop emerged in the South Bronx as a working-class culture of Afrikan youth in America. In its early days, Hip Hop counterposed itself to the mainstream culture of the middle and upper classes in America. The absorption of this radical working-class culture into the mainstream was a systematic

exercise aimed at commodifying the culture and ridding it of its revolutionary potency. In Zimbabwe then, urban grooves rap – urban pop music that fuses Afrodiasporic genres, including rap, with local elements (see Kellerer, this volume) – was being used to propagate the ideas of the ruling-class. This process was aided by state-control of airplay on radio. Artists churned out depoliticized songs or overtly pro-ruling party propaganda. It was the stated aim of the collective to restore Hip Hop's original mission: to uplift oppressed people.

In 2005, Uhuru Network convened the Uhuru Youth Camp at the Southern African Social Forum in Harare. The Southern Afrikan Social Forum Charter opposed neoliberal capitalism, dictatorship and authoritarianism. It embraced horizontal organising based on principles of direct participatory democracy. Indymedia activists from South Africa, housing activists from the Anti-Eviction Committee in Cape Town, libertarian socialists from Zabalaza, and cultural activists from Sounds of Edutainment and Imbawula Trust were in attendance. This gathering sought to establish a common set of organising principles and to forge organic links amongst participating collectives. In this space, consensus was generated on building Hip Hop Activism and orienting Hip Hop culture towards the people's struggles for social justice.

In 2006, the collectives were joined by cultural activists from the Community Networking Forum in Cape Town during the Cultural Activist Network meeting at the Khanya College Winter School in Johannesburg and deliberated on developing a common regional program in Southern Afrika. The cultural activists from the Community Networking Forum subsequently established Soundz of the South, based in Cape Town, as a collective inspired by the ideas of decentralized, horizontal organising against neoliberal capitalism based on theoretical and tactical unity within the movement. It was agreed that collectives would collaborate in working towards Imbawula Trust's *Fire On the Mountain Festival*, set to be held in Johannesburg the next year.

In November 2007, cultural activists from Uhuru Network in Zimbabwe, Ukoo Flani Mau Mau in Kenya, and Blackbox Imprint in Johannesburg joined Imbawula Trust in Johannesburg to organise communities around the *Fire On the Mountain Festival*. The Festival embraced socially conscious street art, Hip Hop music, breakdancing, graffiti, as well as extreme sports. Within it were spaces for ideological conversations and strategising. Activists discussed and embraced the Hip Hop Declaration of Peace and adopted it as a guiding document for the movement. The Fourteenth Principle in the Hip Hop Declaration of Peace encourages Hiphoppas to eliminate poverty, speak out against injustice and shape a more caring society and a more peaceful world. The collectives resolved to set up a regional network, which was to be called the Frontline Movement. Frontline was mandated with organising an annual regional learning journey that would forge organic links amongst collectives, create more opportunities for theoretical discussions and practical collaborations, act as a coordinating platform and catalyse the emergence of a revolutionary Afrikan Hiphop Movement. The Frontline Movement suffered serious setbacks over the next two years due to increased state repression in Zimbabwe and Kenya, the global capitalist crisis and activist burn-out.

In the aftermath of Frontline work, Uhuru Network and Soundz of the South participated in gatherings and direct actions in Nairobi, Dakar and Cairo during the Afrikan Social Forum activities. Cross-border interventions and organising ultimately led to the establishment of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan. The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan was established as an organizing platform that would pick up the work of coordinating collectives from where the Frontline Movement had left. Collectives in the Caravan acknowledged their common organising experience in the Frontline Movement and the Afrikan Social Forum, and thus upheld the Afrikan Social Forum Charter. As Hiphop Activists they also upheld The Hiphop Declaration of Peace. These documents combined provided the founding principles of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan.

In March of 2012, during a meeting in Harare, Uhuru Network (Harare), Sankara Studios (Dakar) and Soundz of the South (Cape Town), resolved to jointly convene the first Afrikan Hiphop Caravan. They drew up a draft concept paper, which was circulated amongst ex-Frontline collectives. Imbawula Trust (Johannesburg), Wasanii Mtaani (Nairobi), and A Well Fed Kenya (Nairobi) were some of the collectives that supported the Caravan. When the call was extended to the diaspora, Global Fam (Portland, Oregon), and Breathe In Break Out (Halle, Germany) decided to come aboard.

From February 2013 to April 2013, the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan, with the theme "Get The Caravan Moving," set out on its first learning journey across the continent, convening a week of events centering on Hiphop Symposia and Hiphop Slams in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Harare, Nairobi, Dakar and Tunis.

### Strategies and Motives: the Organising Principles of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan

The collectives that built the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan have based organising on two central themes: 1) the organisation of Hip Hop activists into a coherent movement and 2) the interaction with and active participation of Hip Hop activists within working-class social movements. The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan advocates an Afrikan Hiphop Movement against capitalism and authoritarianism based on common ideological belief. The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan interacts in ideas with the broader Hip Hop circles and other social movements, but does not seek to speak for, represent or recruit all Hip Hop activists nor activists in other social movements. The organising principle of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan is theoretical and tactical unity. This does not mean a rigid, all-encompassing ideological hegemony within the organisation, but rather that the organisation brings its members together to develop a common strategy towards building a revolutionary Afrikan Hiphop Movement. This work can only occur in a Movement with a high degree of trust, commitment and political unity.

Theoretical and tactical unity is not something imposed, but it is an ideal that the collectives strive for and have developed out of a process of critical thinking, strategising, action and evaluation. It is a concept born out of necessity as the collectives realised that a successful revolution requires a strategy and dedicated work. Of course the way particular collectives have implemented the strategy differs to some degrees due to local circumstances and different approaches. Revolutionary strategy and ideological

discussions within the Movement have allowed the members and collectives who make up the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan to constantly be engaging themselves in the process of revolutionary theory and practice. Since 2005, collectives within the Frontline Movement met annually to deliberate on the state of the culture and collectives' interventions in the social movements. In these gatherings ideological questions were raised as collectives sought to build unity based on an agreed vision. The outcome of these gatherings was a number of theoretical papers being circulated amongst the collectives and increased dialogue and debate on political ideologies. Then, by taking their discussions, reflections and conclusions into media forms, such as mixtapes and documentaries, collectives created more discussion and gained more influence within Hip Hop and other social movements.

### The Broader Framework: Hip Hop Activism in Support of the Working-Class Struggle

In an effort to deepen roots in the working-class struggles on the continent, the day-to-day work of collectives in the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan has been focused around working within the social movements. Social movements that collectives have engaged are movements of oppressed people that seek not only social change, but a breakdown of existing structures of oppression. The social movements the collectives sought out are those that had the potential to counterpose oppressed people's own collective power and vision, and to build counter power against capitalism and the state.

The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan encourages participating collectives to be horizontal, participant-led and democratic in structure as much as possible. Participating collectives agree that an orientation towards direct action and, more importantly, the creation of conditions that transform the participants into self-conscious thinkers and organisers amongst their peers, is the immediate strategic objective of the project. Afrikan Hiphop Caravan collectives have been involved in labour, working class student and community organising. The Caravan aims to act as a catalyst for action and ideas within the Movement. The vision that inspires the Caravan is of free, popular and horizontal communities created by the people across Afrika and beyond.

As a countercultural movement, the Caravan is in opposition to mainstream cultural mores. In fact, it is opposed to mainstream popular culture. Mainstream culture is seen as manipulated through state and corporate control of popular media in order to establish ideological dominance. The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan, on the contrary, expresses the ethos, aspirations, and dreams of a generation of Afrikan people in this present time. It aims to grow a critical mass in order to trigger drastic cultural and political change across Afrika and beyond. The Afrikan Hiphop Caravan is explicitly political. Yet, it does not engage in party politics and it stands against all forms of authoritarianism. Currently, the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan is engaged in strengthening connections amongst collectives in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Bulawayo, Harare, Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Lome, Dakar and Tunis.

Outlook and Goals: the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan in 2014 and Beyond

Conversations that emerged in the aftermath of the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan 2013 have centered on the need to build an active network of Hip Hop activists who are engaged in working people's day-to-day struggles for social and economic justice across Afrika. The deliberations are ongoing within collectives, but consensus has been built on "Hiphop as a Social Movement" being the theme for the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan in 2014. The Caravan in 2014 is expected to move from Cape Town to Cairo through Harare, Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Lome, Dakar and Tunis. Key issues challenging working class communities in Afrika this coming year are the effects of neoliberal capitalism on the continent as well as the dictatorships of some Afrikan states. By engaging these matters in Hip Hop Conferences and Hip Hop Slams, the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan seeks to strengthen solidarity ties amongst collectives in the Afrikan Hiphop Movement and enhance the relevance of Hip Hop Activism to the working people's struggle for social, economic and political liberation. It will be interesting to watch the African Hiphop Caravan unfold itself as a social movement in 2014 and note how the interaction between various shades of Black Nationalism, Marxism and Anarchism, if at all, leads to the emergence of a coherent movement of Hip Hop activists across the continent and beyond, that dialogues with and actively participates in, the concrete struggles of working people's social movements. More so, in an era where Hip Hop has unveiled its potential for mobilisation in the social service delivery protests in Cape Town, as well as demonstrations for democracy and an end to dictatorship in Zimbabwe, Angola, Kenya, Senegal, Tunisia and Egypt. These struggles against the manifestations of neoliberal capitalism and dictatorship on the continent have provided a base for theoretical and tactical unity in the Afrikan Hiphop Movement. The question we ask ourselves is: Will the ideological diversity of collectives and the varied contextual nuances of each Afrikan city stand in our way as we seek out coherence in the movement?

Another big challenge for the emerging Movement is the ideological onslaught of imperialism through mainstream rap and its ancillary industries. The ascendancy of rap into mainstream imperial culture has accelerated consumerism and apathy amongst young Afrikan people, especially those in urban areas. The commodification of cultural resistance has had its own share of damage to movement building, as activists get disillusioned and succumb to poverty and the market forces of the capitalist cultural industries.

Furthermore, as working people's social movements have become more and more oriented towards direct action or people's power, the Afrikan states have increased repression on those who dissent and this has thinned the ranks of the movement with a number of activists being detained, tortured and even murdered. Another dire consequence has been activist burn out. How will the Afrikan Hiphop Movement seek to swell its ranks in the face of state hostility and reprisals? Most states have censored artists out of existence and continue to impose restrictions on the people's freedom of speech, association, assembly and expression.

The collectives within the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan are arguing that by swimming in the milieu of working people's social movements, the strength of the Caravan is amplified and the impact multiplied. They also proffer the Caravan's decentralised and

horizontal organisational structure as a check against dogma and therefore a form of insurance for the continued existence of a diverse but unified federation of Hip Hop activists. Only time will tell where the Afrikan Hiphop Caravan takes Hip Hop activism.