

# KEEPING IT REAL: AMAXHOSA *IIMBONGI* MAKING MIMESIS DO ITS THING IN THE HIP-HOP AND RAP MUSIC OF THE EASTERN CAPE<sup>1</sup>

*by*

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The 'anxiety of authenticity' [is] an anxiety framed by the dissonance between the sense that only those who actually belong to a certain race have a right to produce music identified with that race and the concomitant recognition that 'race' qua race is an inexorably mixed and over determined factor in 'social identity' (Potter 1995, 94).

## Introduction

The province of the Eastern Cape in South Africa has spectacularly beautiful sites and quaint towns, but its appeal is marred by the violence of poverty, high levels of corruption, and the belief in many sectors that the province is severely lacking in aspects of social and economic development. This situation is partly confirmed by the results of a survey undertaken in 2007 when it was found that seventy-two percent of the 6.9 million people in the Eastern Cape were living in poverty. Xhosa speakers constitute eighty-three per cent of that figure and much like in the days of apartheid, their language is a signifier of ethnicity such that Xhosa speaking people refer to themselves as Xhosas or amaXhosa.<sup>2</sup>

Hip-hop and rap music are present in many cities in the Eastern Cape but this article is restricted to an analysis of the rap music and hip-hop scene in Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown.<sup>3</sup> Although the intention of this article is musicological, it is necessary to look at rap music in its contexts, that is, the hip-hop movement locally and globally, and as but one aspect in relation to the other performance and ideological aspects of the hip-hop movement.<sup>4</sup> For this reason I attempt to integrate the discursive attributes

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the hip-hoppers who volunteered their time and thoughts. They are Thulisa Jack, Xolile Madinda, Matthew Calcott-Stevens, Thabo Chashone, Ashley Ngonyama, Dumile (Dumza) Manxoyi, Tobela Fibi, and Sebenzile Zalabe. My thanks also to reviewers of this article. This article is based on research made possible by a grant from the Rhodes University Joint Research Committee in 2008.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/popprov.htm> and <http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000090>. Accessed on 11 June 2010.

<sup>3</sup> The article is based on research undertaken by means of interviews with musicians and hip-hop activists, a review of their music publications, a review of an internet source on hip-hop (<http://www.africanhiphop.com/>), and observations of performances. I recently conducted a survey on hip-hop and rap in the major centres of South Africa and the results of this investigation will be published in a forthcoming book chapter. The focus in this article is on the Eastern Cape and where necessary I will be referring to other parts of South Africa.

<sup>4</sup> Elements in hip-hop are rapping, beat-boxing, break-dancing or b-boying, spray-painting or graffiti, DJ'ing or turntabling, and the promotion of the Universal Zulu Hip-hop Nation's ideology, which is derived from the principles of the Nation of Islam in the USA. The ideology prescribes a certain lifestyle such as abstaining from

of the movement into a narrative where the aesthetics of hip-hop performance in the Eastern Cape and South Africa, and by extension, other parts of the globe, is the main concern. In Grahamstown, hip-hop and rap have an association with the Fingo Revolutionary Movement (FRM), the promotion of various religious beliefs, and it is a voice of resistance against what is perceived as a failing state. In addition, rappers call to attention the isolation of the Eastern Cape from development in mainstream South Africa. This article attempts an historical and critical narrative of these elements in the rap music scene of the Eastern Cape. Moreover it represents hip-hop and the rap music of Xhosa speakers in the Eastern Cape as a participant in what may be called a global hip-hop empire and as an articulation of the specificity of place. It is from this place that attempts to develop inclusion with the rest of South Africa are championed through music and performance.

I begin with an appraisal of current musicological research in the Eastern Cape and then motivate for the argument of 'keeping it real' by way of various theoretical considerations and provide a review of how hip-hop in the Eastern Cape fits into the space of a global subcultural movement. I then proceed to a biographical and historical account of the emergence and development of rap music and hip-hop in the Eastern Cape; and conclude with a discussion on the main stylistic elements in the music.

### **The state of musicological research in the Eastern Cape**

It is tempting to consider the socio-political situation on a par with the music scholarship of the province. A number of music styles, from traditional music, jazz and popular dance music (*langarm*), to western art music, are performed and enjoyed in the province. The traditional music of the province is primarily that of the Xhosa speaking people and while there are concerns that much of the traditional music has already disappeared or stands the risk of disappearing, this music is not receiving much attention in the academic environment.<sup>5</sup>

Jazz is another dominant style of music in the province. A number of prominent South African jazz musicians such as Feya Faku, Zim Ngqawana, and the brothers Duke, Fitzroy and Ezra Ngcubana were raised and received their music education in New Brighton and Walmer Townships in Port Elizabeth, and Queenstown. As a result, the Eastern Cape is recognised as a primary contributor to South African jazz. Attention to this potential field of research is negligible, but there are music enthusiasts such as Jimmy Matyu at the Eastern Cape Herald, who has written articles on jazz musicians in the townships of Port Elizabeth. His articles complement research currently being undertaken by the International Library of African Music in its oral history project with New Brighton/Red Location jazz musicians. But, to date the Eastern Cape does

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alcohol and pork, the American version of black consciousness, and it also has guidelines on the music itself. Readers may want to look at <http://www.zulunation.com/afrika.html> for more details.

<sup>5</sup> In as far as this music may be considered 'traditional', Marie Jorritsma has been doing research on church music in the Karoo and has several publications on the subject.

not have a significant presence in popular music studies in South Africa. The research presented here is a move toward addressing this shortcoming. This research on hip-hop and rap music, on the other hand, expands my research on rap music undertaken in the Western Cape since the late 1990s, and it prepares the way for an investigation of the complexity of a global cultural movement within the specificity of regions in South Africa.<sup>6</sup>

### Theoretical possibilities

In earlier discussions of rap music and hip-hop, American rappers were often compared to the *griots* in west Africa (Campbell 2005, Stephens 1998). For African American rappers, this relationship not only establishes the continuum of black cultural and musical practices between Africa and the USA; it also affirms a vestige of their African roots.<sup>7</sup> In similar vein, I refer to the rapper in the Eastern Cape as *imbongi* (pl. *iimbongi*), an important and vital agent in Xhosa oral poetry who, much like the *griot*, may be perceived as the traditional amaXhosa praise singer. In addition to the praise singing of individuals, *iimbongi* are also critics of those conditions deemed wanting in society (Kaschula 2002). In traditional amaXhosa society the creative output of the *iimbongi* constitutes a canon of oral literature where individuals in a variety of social roles comment on power relations in society and create knowledge about that society (Furniss and Gunners 1995). The *imbongi* therefore inhabits several roles, from being the repository of knowledge, more often about the privileged, to that of being the commentator on passing events. But in addition the *imbongi* has a conservative role as he or she holds the social structure in place. Rappers as well comment on a range of topics, from local and national politics, social conditions in their immediate environment, to critiques (dissing) and praise of one another. While they may be perceived as opposed to a 'mainstream', hip-hoppers also desire affirmation from one another and those in authoritative power. Their actions and utterances are an appeal for the creation of social order, which in the long term will benefit those in power. Another important similarity between rappers and *iimbongi* is their emphasis on morality and ethics. Rap music and the activism of hip-hoppers calls to mind the question of how morality and ethics are enacted in everyday life and practiced by those in authority. Their messages confront the reality of poor governance in the Eastern Cape, but at the same time their actions and music are a creative and ethical demand for the leadership in government to help stabilise their communities. Their participation in a global subculture or social movement may be seen as a celebration of the erasure of borders, the fecundity of a musical form, the amorphous shaping of contemporary social life, and the possibility of a global ecumene. These transformed *iimbongi* or hip-hoppers in

<sup>6</sup> See Watkins 2000, 2001, 2004, forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> Rap music and hip-hop started among African Americans and Latin Americans; this is why I make the distinction between 'Americans' and 'African Americans' in this passage.

the Eastern Cape are nonetheless firmly established in the imaginary and transgressing possibilities of the local. When looking at the situation among black communities in the Eastern Cape, where the lack of development and the isolation from the rest of the country infer a delinking with the ideologies of democracy and black majority governance, then it may be suggested that the rap music and hip-hop scenes of the Eastern Cape are an eloquent response to a neo-apartheid reality.<sup>8</sup>

Another possibility for interpreting the presence of hip-hop in the Eastern Cape, and indeed, of analysing its music and utterances, is the concept of mimesis. This concept legitimates and imbues profoundly the adoption and simulation of sonic and corporeal signifiers across real and imaginary borders. When rap music first appeared, critiques levelled at it determined that the wholesale copying and manipulation of other musicians' music, particularly the music of African American musicians, was a breach of copyright regulations and that the music did not sound original (Bohlman 1993, Keyes 2002, Schumacher 2005). This argument was contested in music scholarship by Gilroy (1993) and Rose (1994), among others, who claimed that given its time and space, the music was an authentic expression of black nationalism in the USA. In their defense, rappers claimed that the incorporation of these sounds into their music was a form of homage and that older musicians should be grateful that their music is not allowed to perish. The issue at stake is the simulating of sounds more often deemed racially exclusive. In this regard, Feld's article on schizophrenic mimesis (1996), in which Herbie Hancock's 'Watermelon man' is the subject of analysis, maps out a direction for scholars in a context where the adoption of another's sound is justified through racial entitlement and presented as simulation for economic gain. 'Watermelon man' cites the music of the Baka from central Africa, and Hancock argued for racial entitlement as his reason for citing the music of the Baka in 'Watermelon man'.

A related and classic piece of literature is Benjamin's (1970) brief discourse on the mimetic faculty. He raises questions which bear relevance across a range of disciplines. One of the questions he asks is whether or not the mimetic faculty is at risk of decay and dying out. The mobility of rap music and hip-hop, and its ability to take root in a variety of settings, suggests that the mimetic faculty is thriving and is not only cerebral and coded in language, but that it also comes to life 'in a flash' through globally connected performance practices and play. As the movement and its music expands and crashes through borders the question of 'keeping it real' becomes a central trope for hip-hoppers concerned with aesthetics and ideology. There is a suggestion here of originality and imitation or copying. Morgan believes 'keeping it real' represents the

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<sup>8</sup> Conditions in present day South Africa point to the fact that while apartheid may have been removed from the country's laws, its influence is an ongoing challenge in everyday life. For this reason I prefer to use a term such as neo-apartheid. Moreover, presuming that there are opposite poles to systemic transformation it is naïve to believe that one can move from one stage to the next without an intermediary stage. See Carmody (2002) for further discussion on neo-apartheid in the context of inequity in South Africa. Concepts such as post-colonialism and neo-colonialism have faced a similar polemic.

'quest for the coalescence and interface of ever-shifting art, politics, representation, performance and individual accountability that reflects all aspects of youth experience' (2005, 211). But 'keeping it real' also suggests that the mimetic is open to the articulation of difference even as hip-hoppers around the globe apparently emulate one another in performance style and in the maintenance of hip-hop ideology. I argue that 'keeping it real' is the mobilisation of a mimetic consciousness that speaks to hip-hop aesthetics, the local in dialogue with the outside, and difference and simulation.

Music scholarship is replete with discussions of mimesis as an aesthetic quality and as a means to analysing techniques in performance, but the application of this concept to unequal social relations as mediated in musical practice and cultural expression, particularly where the market economy and the media are strongly present, is a neglected area.<sup>9</sup> Mimesis continues to inspire my thoughts on music as it alludes to the imitative realm, and yet where music is representative of the asymmetrical relationship between the local and the global, between here and there in the local; and where it reflects on cultural and musical practices deemed imitative yet different, a contemporary interpretation of mimesis argued along the line of the hegemonic, anti-hegemonic continuum, reveals that mimesis deals with a lot more than mere imitation. There is the appearance of direct simulation of hip-hop aesthetics across borders, but the reality is that difference in time, space, and identification render the simulations dissimilar. When interpreting the display of power relations in hip-hop's imitative practices, it is of some interest to think of dissimilitude in the context of 'keeping it real'.

The issue of racial colour provides the opportunity for exploring the means by which the mimetic in rap music and hip-hop shifts into positions of strategic relevance and contestability. Taussig (1993) has eloquently argued for the mimetic in issues of race and class dominance in relation to colonialism. The Cuna in Panama, his focus, had as a result of contact with their colonisers, reproduced through simulation the coloniser's symbolic power and this power paradoxically enabled them to deal with change in their social world. This process transpired in a Cuna space which was ostensibly removed from their outsiders. The experience of the Cuna is manifested anachronistically in the rap music scene of South Africa. As in many other places, the emergence and development of rap music and hip-hop throughout South Africa provides an understanding of continuity between different epochs of change, subjugation, and resistance, in which global networks of performance through simulation and political consciousness facilitate the production of a local struggle against inequity. These processes transpire in a place where the desire for contact and surrogacy is a primary concern.

Transforming definitions of rap and hip-hop and is it ever real?

There's a lot of hypocrisy in hip-hop, especially with these bling rappers who always talk

<sup>9</sup> See Bakker 1999, Clarke 1993, Windsor 1996, for a discussion on the performance of western art music and their interpretation of the mimetic.

about 'real hustling', but actually it's all ideas and not reality. They have nothing to say and no words to express themselves. It's just the profanities and the drinking and bling and sex and drugs and this stuff is actually killing the art and our communities. In fact, I've got no problem with commercialising rap or even the culture if they're selling truth, but it's got to be authentic (Xolile).

And:

You have to look at how corporations affect hip-hop because of their economic muscle. Once they realise the money they can make they start calling it hip-hop. Now the dominant understanding is that rap music is hip-hop. The corporations affect hip-hop. Hip-hop activists do not have the economic power. Major labels are using hip-hop. But hip-hop is not necessarily rap music. This is a global thing. We are fighting against the economic muscle of the corporations (Dumza).

In my first encounters with hip-hop and rap music I was made aware that there is a clear distinction between rap music and hip-hop. American rapper, KRS-One, describes rap as 'something one does or performs' and hip-hop as 'something one lives or experiences' (Keyes 2002, 6). I understood hip-hop as a cultural form including all the elements of hip-hop, from beat-boxing and break-dancing (b-boying) to spray-painting (graffiti), while rap referred specifically to the singing, which is further separated from emceeing.<sup>10</sup> Many rappers I had spoken to also refer to hip-hop as a way of life, which follows the conditions and regulations established in the 1970s by Afrika Black Bambataa and the UZHHN. These days, however, one of the results of its increasing presence in the mainstream music industry and its global dissemination is that the music is referred to as hip-hop. Another development is that elements of hip-hop have now been augmented with the addition of more elements thereby bringing the total to nine (Dumza). These elements are not only the core elements of singing, dancing, spray-painting, turntabling, and the promotion of UHHZN ideology, but also those contrived in the growing relationship hip-hop and rap has with the media and other culture industries around the globe.<sup>11</sup> With the progression of the music from 'authentic' art and ideological practice to commodity, a concomitant anxiety about the authenticity of the music and the movement is expressed in many corners of the globe. Dumza says the only advantage of this changing relationship is that the commercialization of hip-hop enables them to make a living.

The rap music industry in South Africa is following in the footsteps of its counterparts abroad and this development raises another concern about the changing

<sup>10</sup> Emceeing transpires mostly in 'battles.' Emceeing is the basis of competing through the exchange of rhymes and the achievement of rhythmic and lyrical flow, and it accompanies a beat supplied by a DJ. These verbal competitions come to life in what is called the cipher, an opportunity for testing the emcee's ability. The cipher is formed by rappers standing in a circle. The rapping moves from one rapper to another, or there is an exchange between two rappers standing in the middle of the circle and 'killing each other off'. 'Cipher' is the standard spelling but hip-hoppers in Grahamstown spell it as 'psyfo'.

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 4.



perceptions of rap music and its lucrative potential. At the South African Music Awards (SAMA) in 2008, a record company executive commented that if Hip-Hop Pantsula had not won it would have meant the demise of the nascent hip-hop music industry in South Africa. Hip-hop Pantsula is a successful band based in Johannesburg. Tobela says the industry is presenting hip-hop as 'cheesy and plastic', and as a music style emulating its street life attributes but not in 'real' terms. Producers do not want music that is 'positive' and record companies are not going to record music that is not trendy, he continued. 'Positive' is a key reference to the behavior of hip-hoppers and the content of song lyrics, and is an utterance I had encountered in most of my interactions with hip-hoppers from Cape Town to Durban. While 'keeping it real' may offer them the illusion of authenticity and independence, many rappers in South Africa, from POC (Prophets of da City), to Black Noise, Skwatta Kamp, and Godessa, have compromised their former position where they challenged malodorous practices in the South African music industry. The highly successful band, Skwatta Kamp, for instance, was considered radical when they were formed more than ten years ago, but when they signed on with Gallo Records in 2003 they suddenly changed direction.

This movement, Dumza observes, is problematic for hip-hop on a global scale. Presently, the emphasis of the hip-hop music industry in South Africa is on profit and not musical innovation. The problem is whether or not hip-hop artists are considered true to the movement and its expressive forms. A similar experience for practically all music genres, from western art music, to rock 'n roll and jazz, and now hip-hop and rap, is that there has been a progression to what one may call a 'selling out' or attenuation of their musical and cultural attributes. I asked if this development could not be considered a natural progression for all music styles:

It should be challenged. There is a vision, and when you start to reflect, it comes across diluted so that it is not positive. In South African top twenty you find the silliest hip-hop song. If an artist on top twenty is presenting the culture in a negative way then we need to challenge it. I am happy that I can influence the guys on the community radio station. In our ciphers and at home this is the kind of music we listen to. It's great to progress but very difficult for us activists to fight back. This is growing and becoming a disease. If we can't heal it now then hip-hop is going to die (Sebenzile).

I also asked why most people rather want to adopt what they call 'fake hip-hop'? Are people at all interested in real hip-hop? Sebenzile said:

it's a lack of education because if you decide to become an emcee you have to go deep into what it means to be a rapper and an emcee and try to break the barrier between the two. Most of the guys who love holding the mic care only about that, without understanding anything else because in their minds there are no other elements. It's just a musical tool they can make money with. An emcee is someone who knows the culture, who decided to take one of the elements and make a success of it and it is someone who is learned about his surroundings. Not learned in the context of going to school or university and all. You know what's right, what's wrong. You can distinguish between the hip-hop that is real and the hip-hop that has a negative influence on society. All the years I have been around people like

Dumza; people who started hip-hop here in PE and people who helped us to be grounded. Even the tapes we listened to, whether from the States or Africa, always gave us this message of hope. We're black and we're conscious of it and despite the politics, sometimes the oppression is within ourselves. Not loving yourself as a black person. Being an emcee and rapper and being in the culture become so diluted. Sometimes I interview an artist and ask are you an emcee and they say 'yes' and I ask if they 'battle' and they say battling is immature and something for kids. There is no creativity and they are deleting one part of emceeing. Sometimes they don't even ask what is the significance. Maybe he is an artist or maybe just using the genre of hip-hop. I believe, like Dumza said, we can influence them. Even today, they don't go to ciphers, or gatherings where there is knowledge so it's always about the booze, women, money and slanderous words. It's a challenge more especially when they say 'I'm a hip-hop DJ or activist'. It should always be about respecting a person.

Tobela's response is:

I also think there is a little bit of ignorance among the public in the sense that negativity is always a top seller and hip-hop is supposed to be more of a positive message to the community and hip-hoppers. People who want to be in hip-hop will choose the easiest route so they say that part is limiting me because it always talks about being positive but there is also the negative side. If I want to take on the negative people they are going to squash me. They say 'I want to make money and I want to make it now' and see the other elements of hip-hop as limiting them. People want to be stars overnight and are ignoring the fact that hip-hop can make a positive contribution.

Regardless of where in the world one studies the unfolding of hip-hop and rap music, there is an ongoing dilemma as to how the hip-hop movement can 'keep it real', at the same time as it is trying its utmost in advocating its messages of achieving positivity and selfhood, perhaps with the assistance of local authorities. It is important to bear in mind the dialogue transpiring not only with the rest of the global hip-hop community and the music industry, but also in the relationship hip-hoppers in the Eastern Cape desire to pursue with the rest of the country, and particularly, with those in local government. This relationship is fraught and the marginalization of Port Elizabeth artists and of rap music is another demonstration of perhaps a lack of interest or vision on behalf of local authorities, who in contrast to their colleagues in the Western Cape, for example, do not seem to realise the value of harnessing the developmental potential in hip-hop. In this regard, the recognition a crew such as Black Noise enjoys in community structures, schools, and by the local government in the Western Cape, is unprecedented when compared to other parts of South Africa. In contrast, hip-hoppers in Port Elizabeth are active in promoting the movement and its music on the Nkqubela community radio station in Zwide but have been struggling to win over the local government and the Department of Arts and Culture.

A measure of how one may view the 'realness' of hip-hop is therefore in the responses it evokes from other sectors in the community. While their desire for approval seems evocative of a distinctly local interest, the desire for 'keeping it real' nonetheless posits them in a space of commonality with their peers in other parts of South Africa



and around the globe. 'Keeping it real' becomes a mimetic ideal shared globally and offers them the possibility of making the local a priority even as they are increasingly thrown into a global network. In this global network of contact and exchange, 'keeping it real' has become contingent and interrogative. In the global hip-hop lexicon, and in the face of simulating performance styles across many kinds of borders, there is nothing new in the desire for 'keeping it real' but this expression nonetheless seems to offer a negotiated aesthetic moment, which in this case depends on the exchange with those who wield political, creative and cultural authority. Dumza believes it is a struggle to maintain the authenticity of the movement and the music because there are

two sides to hip-hop, the positive in terms of reaching out and promoting. The other has to do with the negative thing of compromising the art form. We cannot run away from the reality that there is something positive about hip-hop. The Department of Arts and Culture in the Eastern Cape, particularly PE, does not respect local artists. That we realised. After 1994 we never really see local artists in the same number as Joburg artists. They don't respect what they have locally. We are involved in discussions and trying to convince them. We had a march here of local artists so their neglect affects artists of all stripes. They don't treat them right, pay them right, or organize workshops that can elevate the arts. So that is the challenge but not to say they don't support. They do support some of the initiatives but their priority is Joburg (Johannesburg) artists

And

if they ever support it will have to be jazz only. There are other genres they could support. There needs to be more education then they will care more about hip-hop culture. From business there is less support. They want to see a return on their investment and when they sponsor they want to know who the artist is. They will invest in someone who is more on TV or from Joburg because this is their target market (Tobela).

Given all these pressures, not only stylistically but also in the need for approval from the outside, I asked why they continue holding on to the 'positive' aspects of the movement and try to 'keep it real' when there is the potential for making a substantial amount of money? Dumza replied

there is nothing wrong with people making money out of hip-hop. It becomes wrong when you compromise the art form and misrepresent the culture. Now the problem is people will do anything to get money so these so-called rap stars, most of them do not mind saying negative things just for the purpose of making money. It's the whole thing of preserving. Most people are familiar with hip-hop but don't understand other things to hip-hop, like turntabling and b-boying. With hip-hop people think it is rap music only. We live in a capitalist society. Time is money but that on its own does not mean we must misrepresent the culture because the problem of money as primary objective tends to affect the culture. There is a distinction between those who think of money as primary object and art form as secondary. For us activists the art form is primary not the money. We must not sell our souls. I know prominent artists from different cultures and most of them are ignorant. Being a rap star does not translate into you being grounded. For us, hip-hop will die slowly

if most people are moved by money being the primary objective. It is important for us to preserve the art form, cultivate it and paying respect to those who lay the foundation of hip-hop. The moment you misrepresent we doubt how that can affect society because the art form is a product of our society. We need to reflect on our society in a progressive way. At the end of the day we want to educate people and preserve the art form. When there is a summit parents must say we know the kids are involved in something positive. We distinguish between hip-hop fanatics and activists. Activists are grounded and understand the objectives laid down by the UZHHN. We cannot allow such elements to destroy the movement.

'Keeping it real' is an aspiration through which hip-hoppers acquire meaning and fulfillment. It is the means by which the success of the movement and their participation in its various mediations may be measured. Among young people with little to no access to material resources or affirmation, 'keeping it real' has become a rallying call and the basis for debates around aesthetic quality and hip-hop principles. 'Keeping it real' sets them apart from the mainstream in local and global terms, and the centrality of hip-hop aestheticism and rhetoric to their music, performances, and lived experiences, affirms the value of their membership to the movement.

### **The local emceeding with the global**

A dominant observation of rap music and hip-hop in their various locations is the performance-mediated localization of a global cultural movement. The music, dancing, turn-tabling, and spray-painting, are performances which share Rose's (1994) understanding of hip-hop aesthetics as 'layering, rupture and flow'. Hip-hop and rap music reveal the fascinating mobility of sound and creates the impression that their adoption may be spontaneous and a result of access to the media. There are, however, specific local reasons, ranging from novelty, pleasure, and identification, through which it is possible to account for the rapid spread of rap music and hip-hop. When I asked hip-hoppers how one may account for the emergence of rap music and hip-hop in other parts of the world and in the Eastern Cape, Dumza parsed Feld's application of the mimetic and replied that it is a black music written in the black experience. Dumza says while it all comes back to Africa this does not mean hip-hop should be confined to Africa. Rap music and hip-hop transcend borders and are global. When one listens to the rap music of the Eastern Cape it talks about the majority, that is, the poor, or the situation of women, and when it comes to hip-hop perhaps people in different parts of the world can identify with it because it speaks to the challenges they endure. These challenges are global and not confined to any particular region or racial group. Unlike other genres that focus on fantasy, people realise hip-hop is a tool to raise consciousness, he added. Tobela replied with an insightful analogy, saying that usually a company has a vision and wants to grow and possibly become a multinational company. Everywhere the company finds itself, the same vision and values are observed. In much the same way, hip-hop is a culture and it is able to move anywhere as long as followers know and maintain the rules of the culture (Tobela). Since the fluidity and porosity of contact between seemingly disparate groups

render the notion of 'culture' more tenuous and virtual these days, Tobela's utterance brought me to the question of how they perceive culture.

Dumza described culture as a way of life. He says when speaking of culture one speaks of history and culture is a historical product. The elements in hip-hop are a reflection of that particular culture. Hip-hoppers speak about the philosophy of knowledge of self, that is, of knowing one's history. In the interest of 'keeping it real' and to maintain the integrity of the movement he believes one has to change one's worldview when one embraces hip-hop. As far as the 'cultural' elements of hip-hop are concerned, he says that the oral tradition of Africa and the art of emceeing and b-boying recall ancient African arts. Spray-painting is a derivative of cave painting and the latter he naively considers an African art only. Tobela says when a hip-hopper starts acting against a particular aspect of the culture he or she is 'raping the culture'. In the interest of local hip-hop culture and for the benefit of 'keeping it real' across boundaries, there are specific elements which must be observed. When one element is isolated and sold off then this action is no longer about hip-hop culture, he concludes. Culture, then, is viewed in the context where hip-hop and rap music, wherever they may surface, uphold the basic tenets of the movement in the interest of 'keeping it real'. 'Keeping it real' is an onerous task which these *iimbongi* of the neo-apartheid era are pursuing with great respect for the movement. Local and global followers of the movement and its music have long emphasised the notion of 'keeping it real' but in the case of these hip-hoppers, 'keeping it real' is an assertion of their marginalized place; it helps maintain the dignity of the form and their role in the local propagation of a global movement.

### **Surrogacy and the beginnings of the hip-hop movement in the Eastern Cape**

The following observations on the hip-hop scene in Grahamstown were made by a rap music crew called Wordsuntame. Crew members are from different parts of the country and students at Rhodes University. Ashley says he was told there is a great deal of hip-hop activity at Rhodes University. He has now realised there is not much going on. Thabo has never heard rap music on Rhodes Music Radio. Matthew says there is no real scene and when clubs advertise emcee evenings, they have someone accompanying rappers on a Casio keyboard. This he says is not rap. Thabo says people in Grahamstown are confused about hip-hop and need an education. Ashley concurs, saying that hip-hop nights at the local nightclub have more r&b playing than real hip-hop. People in the Eastern Cape wear expensive hip-hop clothes and that is supposed to indicate their 'realness', he observed.

On the other side of the coin is Xolile 'X' Madinda. Xolile is one of the founders of hip-hop in Grahamstown. Xolile first encountered hip-hop in 1994 and two years later started rapping to the beats of DJ Miles who is from the Eastern Cape. Xolile often performs at ciphers and community events, and is also an activist in the community. He introduces youths in the area to hip-hop and encourages them to participate in enriching and empowering activities. The alternative is them spending time in taverns (shebeens). Xolile estimates that there are around fifty crews in Grahamstown and

when he started there was only one crew. Most hip-hoppers are rappers only. Xolile has trained many rappers in the creative and ideological aspects of hip-hop. His crew, named X Nasty, who raps in Xhosa, has a considerable following.

Xolile is part of a rap collective called the Fingo Revolutionary Movement (FRM). 'Fingo village' is the name of the oldest black township in Grahamstown and is the name of a smaller socio-cultural group subsumed under the dominant amaXhosa. Xolile describes FRM as a community organization which aims to improve conditions in the townships of Grahamstown. The emphasis in the FRM is to provide young people and children who had been 'let down by society' with performance skills and a positive sense of selfhood. Xolile says the FRM is concerned with organising young people and making them responsible for the welfare of the community. They train novices who are further required to become independent and spread the messages in hip-hop. In keeping with an observation I had made in the Equilibrium nightclub one evening, young men are also educated to show respect towards women. Equilibrium in New Street, Grahamstown, hosts break-dancing, turn-tabling, ciphers, and rapping performances on a regular basis. Eitan Prince, a journalism lecturer and hip-hop fan, believes that being members of the FRM gives young people a sense of belonging. The FRM is a forum where they share ideas and inspire one another, and debate issues affecting their lives and communities. Furthermore, he believes that membership to the FRM fills in those areas lacking in their lives since most of the members are from black townships in Grahamstown, where resources for everyday life are meager and hard to obtain. By participating in the FRM they therefore learn to feel better about themselves (qtd. in Mbuli 2008). In this capacity, the FRM fulfils the role of surrogate.

Xolile says it is difficult to define hip-hop because it is part of what he is and what he does. Being a hip-hopper means he is alive. It enlightens and allows him to think critically and hip-hop is a way of relating to his being in Africa. He focuses on emceeing because it helps him to communicate messages and that is what being an artist is about. He uses emceeing as an expression of his activism. As an artist, he is more privileged to write what he wants and to speak without restraint about community issues. Xolile regards hip-hop moreover as a means of allowing young people to sing about subjects avoided in everyday interaction (qtd. in Mbuli 2008). Further, he says that

our politics is very different; we just rap about what we feel and about daily living. My revolution is for my community. Hip-hop is an art form that everyone can understand. It's accessible to everyone, whether you're in art circles or not. It brings stuff to life in a way that intellectual writings and the research and speeches of historians and scientists can't. It's also not just rap; all music in fact is very dangerous. Think about Women's Day. Those women walked a long way to the Union Buildings and I'm sure they were tired and scared. I doubt if they would have managed if they didn't sing those songs of freedom (Xolile).

Rappers usually have ciphers in township streets on weekend afternoons, when they meet and trade rhymes and battle one another in contests. These ciphers serve the dual purpose of entertaining and developing their skills in performance. Rappers in Grahamstown participate in performance events organised by the BUA Poetry Society

on Rhodes University campus and at Equilibrium. There is a sense of community at these events even during competitions. At these events emcees express their views on politics, government and the various social ills affecting their communities. Ciphers are informal and anyone can perform, or rap alongside the artist or group performing that moment. They include traditional African ways of musicking, such as call and response, where the emcee calls out and the audience responds. Participation is however limited to shouts of 'say yeah'. Other performance aspects of hip-hop, like break-dance, beat-boxing, poetry performed in the *imbongi* style, and singing and rapping, are included in a performance. During many performances, emcees 'diss' or insult each other with the intent to build rather than sever relationships. Unfortunately, at one such gathering on a street corner in Joza township one Saturday afternoon, the dissing performed by rappers dressed in Rastafarian outfits and headgear, went to the other extreme of hate speech against gay men in the community. Nonetheless, on most other occasions these hip-hop events not only advance social consciousness but are also recreational activities which are hard to come by in the townships of Grahamstown.

Hip-hop in Port Elizabeth started in 1987, after the release of American hip-hop and break-dancing films such as *Breakin'* (1984) and *Electric Boogaloo* (1984) and their dissemination around the globe. Co-incidentally, these films initiated the break-dancing and hip-hop scene in Cape Town as well. The break-dancing films were a primary influence on local hip-hoppers. Break-dancing became very popular and in the process the dancing motivated hip-hoppers into finding more information on hip-hop. They were especially interested in the emceeing and DJ'ing. Hip-hop spread from one location to another; from New Brighton to Kwamagxaki for instance, with Dumza the primary agent in this mobility. He and Tobela belonged to the Rap Teenage Club who then formed another crew called the Funky Fresh Crew. Tobela says they influenced other people and tried to collect any information on hip-hop. In the interest of 'keeping it real' they filtered out material they deemed negative and at first they could not understand all the information they encountered. They began sharing pirated rap music cassettes with others because few had access to the music. This process of sharing and exchange in the townships is seen as the beginning of the movement in Port Elizabeth. There were crews by the names of First Rock in Schauderville, and Funky Fresh Crew and Rap Teenage Club in Zwide. These crews were mostly b-boys (break-dancers) and not fully-fledged hip-hoppers. Most of the members of these crews have passed away.

In the early 1990s, POC came to visit and they had a strong influence on local hip-hoppers. POC members, Shaheen and Ramone, who are among the original members, visited the hip-hoppers in Port Elizabeth many times and there was a great deal of interaction. Dumza says they highly respected and were inspired by POC's albums because they are the pioneers of hip-hop and rap music in South Africa. Kente and artists from Zwide formed another organisation called Eastern Cape Hip-hop. One of these artists, called Master KG, has become a prominent artist in Johannesburg. In Motherwell, in the mid-1990s, the M Family was formed and one of them later became



Abantu. Many b-boys from Northern Areas participated in the Battle of the Year in Cape Town. The Northern Areas are a district consisting of a number of townships north of the city of Port Elizabeth. In the early 2000s, two important hip-hoppers by the names of J Box (Jason) and Rushay arrived on the scene and both remain active in the hip-hop scene. With this much interest from the community, a Hip-hop society formed in 1997 became the Afrikan Hip-hop Nation in 2000. Members were from the black and 'coloured' townships of Port Elizabeth. There was a similar organization formed in Cape Town in the early 1990s and these Afrikan Hip-hop Nations are usually considered virtual branches of the UZHNN. Hip-hoppers organized on the campus of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) as well but realised they wanted the support from their immediate communities, not students from elsewhere who resided on campus. One important crew who emerged at the time and who continues to exist is Shades of Blackness. Shades of Blackness is the first crew from Port Elizabeth who played rap music live and the first to promote all elements of hip-hop culture. They also focus on socio-political issues affecting the country and local communities. They are resourceful because they perform with jazz and R&B artists. Shades of Blackness is considered a 'pioneer of organic hip-hop' (Dumza) in the Eastern Cape. They have conducted workshops in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage. Most artists, like Abantu and 100% Black, were educated in these workshops and most of them sing about political issues. Dumza believes Afrika Hip-hop Nation laid the foundation for such an approach to their music. Presently, artists with a strong presence in the community, such as Abantu, 100% Black and Artificial, promote hip-hop skills, and teach novices emceeing skills.

In 2000, a club in Central, Port Elizabeth, called the Urban Connection, became the leading venue for hip-hop performances. Hip-hoppers had to meet in Central because of its location, as Central has many nightclub venues and facilities (Sebenzile). Urban Connection was a success to the point where there are now attempts to revive the club. Urban Connection had a reputation for bringing together politically conscious emcees who kept hip-hop 'real'. Their dedication was such that hip-hoppers walked from the locations on the outskirts of town to Central and sometimes they were caught out late without any means of returning home. Khomo was the most important emcee at the time. Beat makers such as Oyama, and Duai in Motherwell, supplied artists with beats for their emceeing. Fans from places such as Umtata and East London living on the NMMU campus attended the ciphers. This period is considered the peak of hip-hop in Port Elizabeth. According to Sebenzile, each present-day crew claims Urban Connection as its primary source of training and motivation in hip-hop.

Port Elizabeth has an all women crew called Alpha Phonetics (AP). Their marginality is emphasized by not having access to the music industry the way Godessa has. Godessa is a rap group in Cape Town consisting of three women. AP raps about black women in society and the challenges they endure. These challenges are rape, alcohol and drug abuse. The aim of such lyrics is to have women recognize their power for changing their behaviour and thereby having a positive influence on their



communities. AP performs in public spaces and parking lots in Port Elizabeth. They have a DJ, a sound system with turntables and speakers, and they rap in Xhosa. As far as the music is concerned, the aim is to use American hip-hop type bass lines and to combine it with 'raw black emceeing', like French rappers do (Thulisa). This entails singing in Xhosa and in the vernacular, identified as slang Xhosa.

Participating in the cipher is considered an important means of developing emceeing skills. There are a few platforms in Motherwell and on occasion there are performances in Zwide where emcees can develop and display their skills. On Sundays, emcees and spectators meet informally in different parts of the townships. Ciphers are becoming a dominant aspect of hip-hop performance and this may be attributed to the fact that the basic technology of microphones and speakers are easily accessible and, much like the movement itself, highly mobile. While there is much discussion on how technology democratizes musical creativity especially in hip-hop (Goodwin 2005), there is moreover a discursive relationship between performer and technology, and an interrogation of aesthetics that goes into the heart of musical production and performance by the oppressed. As Sebenzile observes, 'someone will say I have a speaker, let's get together. In the park, in the streets, it does not matter where. It goes back to the basics where you don't need much.'

Sebenzile says he is happy with the progress of hip-hop in Port Elizabeth because there was a time when events were scarce. There is growing realization of the importance of organising hip-hop and of 'pushing it in a certain direction', he added. There is a chapter of the Afrikan Hip-hop Nation in Port Elizabeth and now an Institute of Hip-hop culture as well. Presently, young people who are interested in writing lyrics and emceeing are recruited and they record material but they do not approach the art form professionally. Most of them are merely having fun because hip-hop is fashionable, and that is the challenge for hip-hoppers with other interests. Artists end up losing much of their potential to earn money because they do not have a business plan, have no knowledge about registering their songs, and do not have managers. Many artists only perform for a year or two then disappear. In comparison to Cape Town and Johannesburg, hip-hoppers in Port Elizabeth do not have a high level of professionalism (Sebenzile). Another challenge is that most people are more interested in the emceeing although it is not required that everyone participates in the same activity. It is also a struggle to recruit women because they are not keen on attending performances in the townships, but in places like Central more women participate in activities.

One problem in the Eastern Cape is that rappers in small towns may be weak because they do not have much contact with the rest of the world. It is believed more competition will improve the standards of emceeing. The reality is that the movement is growing rapidly. With hip-hop gaining momentum it is believed that most young people would want to participate in hip-hop activities. Sebenzile says the response in their community to the inclusion of local rap music on their community radio playlist is 'positive' because they are playing mostly music by Port Elizabeth artists; people the community know personally. Those are the kids, brothers and sisters of listeners. Even

among these community-based artists there is competition. In terms of knowledge about hip-hop he considers himself a novice but is happy with their progress in the community. In other attempts to promote the movement, the research conducted by Tobela revealed that people are very keen on improving their knowledge of hip-hop: 'We received good response and people who did not understand anything come to sessions and tried to match what they heard on radio with what they saw. We are reaching out especially to the female crowd. There needs to be more of those sessions and more knowledge to be broadcast', he observed. These attempts at reaching out help allay their fears about the authenticity of the movement.

### **A question of style**

Hip-hop is something that over the years has developed and is continuing to develop. Hip-hop is not stagnant. Every time you hear there is a new way of expression. And more local, when emcees write their bars to deliver a message and to seek justice, like against xenophobia with a speech and a nice beat. They like to express themselves in that manner. The energy and flow, on stage and tape, it is always coming fresh. I was attracted by it. This is something different. Going on the streets and producing the tapes and being influenced by all types of music but this is our home and our main influence. I believe it is going to grow with more fresh ideas. Everyday there is a hip-hop concert to sell a different product because they see it appealing to the majority of the youth (Sebenzile).

Following Potter's (1995) persuasive argument for 'spectacular vernaculars' in rap and hip-hop, linguistically and in the context of rap music style, this section first focuses on the myriad exchanges and references transpiring in the language used in the rap music of the Eastern Cape. It then proceeds to describing the main theme emerging in the texts of the music and argues that these texts produce meanings evocative of a spectacular vernacular embedded in a local or South African network of exchange and contact. In this network, language and music are communicative acts circulating in the continuum of a global and locally invoked sentiment of 'keeping it real'. Language or speech utterance is one of the tools readily available for negotiating the goal of 'keeping it real'. Language is the tool by which hip-hoppers and rappers negotiate and affirm their identifications and defer the ongoing 'anxiety with authenticity' in the movement. Thus many hip-hoppers I spoke to believe that music performed in the local language, or the 'vernac', as they say, contributes to keeping the music 'real'. This is the reason why rappers consider it taboo to mimic American accents. Eastern Cape rappers do not want to follow commercially successful formulae and do not use American slang and ebonics, or black American English. Their music stands to lose its 'realness' and authenticity the moment the language of the other is introduced.

The other dimension to their use of language, again, much like their counterparts in the rest of South Africa and around the globe, is the pervasive exercise of code-switching. Code-switching comes across as the wanton or occasionally strategic mixture of two or more official languages. In their context, code-switching is expressive of their

oratory power and it affirms their tenuous relationship with what may be considered a 'tradition' in amaXhosa society. These features in the music, together with the repertoire of Xhosa click sounds, add to the spectacle of the vernacular. Not only is the vernacular embodied in the utterance or speech act, the vernacular moreover is also present in the space and place of the music, for without the words, the music can be identified as being from anywhere else. Music and language, or the 'vernac', intersect in the rap song, making clear their difference and integration, and signifying the musicians' attempts at 'keeping it real'. The combination of various languages evident in the music is a 'shout out', in hip-hop language, of their hybrid identifications and desires. For instance, Xolile says he used to write and rhyme in English, but now uses Xhosa as the medium for his music. He elaborates on his use of this language, which he claims resonates more deeply with his audience

Language is important but it's really not all about what language you rap in. The only reason I rap in Xhosa is because I rap specifically for the people in the Eastern Cape. They have to be able to fully relate to and connect with the music. In fact, a lot of the beauty is in the language, and this also challenges the whole idea of believing that you can say something significant only in English. But then again, so many hip-hop artists rap in their vernacular but if you listen closely, there's no meaning. In fact, you're just swearing and rhyming and misusing the language.

I asked hip-hoppers in Port Elizabeth their perceptions of language in their music. Tobela says they use English more because they want everyone to understand the music. This practice allows an opportunity for growth because if people understand them then it is easier to develop a following (Tobela). Dumza says language is a tool to convey one's message and this is linked to one's culture. If one is very confident in a particular language then it is that person's choice. Language is linked with the type of market they encounter or wish to attract. He says there is a risk with the preference for a specific language as they must exercise sensitivity to the colonial and apartheid idea of tribalism, in which language difference was regularly contrived and mobilised by oppressive forces as the basis for forming different 'tribes.' This is a challenge and they do not desire a situation where people promote themselves as Venda or Sotho because this has the potential of dividing hip-hoppers. The means of overcoming these potential tribalised identifications is to understand oneself positively, a critical underpinning of hip-hop ideology, and to raise awareness of black consciousness (Dumza). Tobela says the sooner one understands where one comes from the easier it is to communicate with members of other nationalities. He says if one did not accept black consciousness there would be no love for the other, and racial boundaries would proliferate.

In contrast, Sebenzile says when listening to a Tswana artist one is not learning anything but a Xhosa emcee has more to offer since he or she 'will go deep'. People like Abantu 'make us proud of being Xhosa'. There is moreover a historical or cultural precedent to rap music offered by Xhosa orality, where *imbongi* recite epic poems without the aid of written texts. This practice is viewed as a manifestation of black

pride because rappers speak and sing in the language of their parents and ancestors (Sebenzile). I also wanted to know whether the tones or the rhythms of the language are more important in the music. Tobela answered that rappers want their music to sell but in Xhosa rap they will add a click sound to almost every word. Clicks are inserted anywhere without making sense. The two features of mixing the languages of English and Xhosa, and the grain of the click sounds particular to the Xhosa language, result in a texture of sonic ruptures redolent of the history of social contact in South Africa.

Apart from the tribalising potential of indigenous South African languages, rappers use another previously unofficial language in their music. In 'Bantustan rap' by Bantustan, for example, they express the desire to improve the standard of rap music locally and globally but they encounter challenges from other rappers who 'sell-out' the integrity of the movement. Parts of the song switch back and forth between English and Xhosa but the language used in the song is mostly *isicamtho*. *Isicamtho* is a language created in the 1950s in the black townships (locations) of South Africa. It combines the eleven official South African languages into a hybrid language spoken by people who shared a common space but spoke different languages. At the height of apartheid, speaking the language or social code became an act of defiance against a regime that enforced ethnic differences (De Klerk 2003, 2006). *Isicamtho* has already made an impression in the public domain and the media, and has entered global circulation with *Tsotsi* (2005), an award winning film depicting the life of a gangster on the Witwatersrand. Eitan Prince says the growing recognition of *isicamtho* among hip-hoppers enables them to confidently use it as a mode of self-expression, identification, and resistance (qtd. in Mbuli 2008). Only those familiar with this dialect will understand the full meanings of the song. These different languages in *isicamtho*, which comes to attention in music, may be viewed as different forms of representation which invert linguistic propriety, thereby turning *isicamtho* into a language of carnival and survival. It is a language that challenges convention at the same time as it affirms its rightful place in society.

The area between the authoritative power of the written word and the musicality of the spoken word complicates the perception of language and utterance in rap music performance. Dumza says the most important point to remember is that the voice is the first weapon in emceeing and the second weapon resides in poetic skill. Emceeing requires certain tools, such as rhyming, punch lines, syncopation, and flow. These tools represent the difference between a rapper and an emcee. The content of a song and its delivery, and the skills on display, are very important because the emcee can say anything but has to work hard in whichever language he or she chooses. There is moreover a strong desire to use the language in a manner by which their geographical space is called out and made clear. Sebenzile says the rapper, Abantu, names various places in Zwide in his songs and this gives the music reality.

The uniqueness of Eastern Cape rap music, Dumza says, is that owing to the workshops conducted by the African Hip-hop Nation, most songs are progressive or demonstrate political consciousness, and link their music with community-based

interests. He erroneously believes this situation is different to Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, where rappers are not focusing on real life.<sup>12</sup> Most Eastern Cape artists have political content in their songs and perhaps this has to do with the fact that the Eastern Cape was a major site of resistance to apartheid. For most artists the content is more important than the beat. There is always a relevant message. For instance, 100% Black sings about the need for black consciousness now more than ever before. Local artists are not known for negative behaviour and their actions are positive. An example is Abantu. They performed in Johannesburg and the critics observed positively on the absence of swearing and their respect for women (Dumza). Adding to its positivist reception is Sebenzile who says that there is discipline in Port Elizabeth hip-hop. In a cipher there is a demonstration of love for hip-hop with no connotations of money although artists still want remuneration for their performances.

Songs created by rappers are dependent on technological virtuosity. In the music itself, the primary musical instruments are the computer and turntable. The vocoder machine is used with limited effect. Rappers use sampled sounds and scratching. Their technological knowledge is a means of exploring the potential of a limitless genre, which may also be its nemesis as it migrates to this many places in the world where its myriad transformations occasionally erode the original meanings of the music and the original culture of hip-hop. This situation makes it even more challenging to 'keep it real,' especially when market forces or political ideology in countries such as Cuba or China enter the relationship.

Although the music is largely sampled, rappers use diverse music instrumental sounds from the keyboard, drum set, guitar, electric organ, and brass instruments. Rappers also use traditional instruments such as a drum, and an instrument associated with the advent of Christianity in the region, the tambourine. In many songs such as Wordsuntame's 'It's your baby,' which addresses unplanned pregnancy, the sound coming from the drum, hi-hat and guitar, has a smooth flowing texture. In another song, such as Abantu's 'An angel is man,' with its Christian message, the sound is thickly textured with the muted tune resembling a song broadcast on a radio with poor reception. Dumza says the music is based on 'Hebrewism' (his word) not Christianity, but the music sounds like it belongs to the Zionist or any other African Independent Church tradition.

In the practice of employing references to diverse musical styles and musical devices, rappers often display a wealth of knowledge about various musical styles and musicians. In many parts of the globe a prerequisite to membership is that rappers must acquire a wide knowledge of various music repertoires, but in this case rappers draw more on local music styles such as jazz and Christian hymns or anti-apartheid anthems. The latter inclusion is a clear reference to how conditions in present day South Africa are perceived. Tobela says that although jazz is a strong influence it does not mean that they do not experiment in the music. They use chord progressions

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<sup>12</sup> Listening to the music of Black Noise and Godessa, among others, makes this observation ludicrous.



usually found in African jazz. Sampling is used mostly where there is a lack of musical knowledge and the producer makes sure there are beat tracks for an artist when he or she has to perform in a cipher. Sebenzile says it is easy to sample and they use computer programmes to help them compose their own melodies. He says most of the artists prefer the influence of jazz on their music. The influence however usually depends on a musician's background and may include European art music. Sebenzile says further that the African element may be heard in the music of the drums. The rhythm is there and recalls a distant past, he observed.

In general terms, a large proportion of the music has jazz-like and r&b melodies; others include references to samba or funk style music. They use traditional amaXhosa melodies or anti-apartheid struggle anthems, and speech, which either invokes the Christian symbolic world, as in Wordsuntame's 'People-good words', or damns it, such as 3WR's 'Hell is home', with a line saying 'Fuck the Bible'. Another important crew in Grahamstown called Bantustan released an album called 'Banturap'. This name is evocative and strengthened by the social messages in their music. Their rapping is accompanied by smooth-flowing r&b style music, rather than the phat beats and samples unique to rap music.

This is not the space for a review of the social conditions in the Eastern Cape yet it is important to be aware of the influence economic isolation and the lack of political will in the province have on rap music. The isolation is compounded by numerous social ills, of which prostitution and the concomitant AIDS epidemic are but a few. The AIDS scourge in the province seems to dominate the content of their lyrics. In Bantustan's *To Marhoshha* (To Prostitutes), the musicians sing about prostitution, a widespread means of earning an income and also a reason for the spreading of AIDS. The song addresses prostitution in the Xhosa speaking community and disingenuously argues that prostitution is attributable to the influence of the West. The song describes how women who prostitute enjoy a prosperous life style where the consumption of hamburgers and coca cola indicate their sophistication. They avoid traditional vegetables (*imifuno*) and fruit (*iziqhamo*) because consuming them is a sign of backwardness. Reflecting on contemporary amaXhosa society, and this is a widespread phenomenon throughout underclass townships in South Africa, these women consider men for their wealth. The song claims mothers encourage young women to look at the size of a man's wealth. These women seem to like rich men but the song warns that they will lose their beauty and be left with nothing. Overall, the song is about a 'lost generation' who follows western values at the expense of their own. Another song dealing with the consequences of AIDS in a poverty-stricken household is Abantu's *Nontsundu*. Nontsundu is described as irresistible and glamorous but these qualities may also lead to her downfall as her charms leads to her receiving too much attention. The inevitable outcome is that she has an unplanned baby and later finds herself experiencing financial difficulties as well as the effects of AIDS. The woman singer in the background warns amaXhosa women to be cautious in their dealings with men.



## Conclusion

This article has described the emergence of hip-hop and rap music in the Eastern Cape and has revealed the dilemmas hip-hoppers experience in the interest of 'keeping it real'. 'Keeping it real' is a mimetic gesture and it not only mobilizes their thoughts and actions; 'keeping it real' is a stylistic feature or aesthetic choice and an ideological position, through which artists demonstrate their connectedness to the here and now. 'Keeping it real' is a 'shout out' which enables them to make clear their position in the social hierarchy of South Africa, in as far as their actions and utterances reflect on extant circumstances. At the same time, 'keeping it real' affirms their identifications and their relationship with those of similar mind in the global hip-hop movement. This article reveals that while there is an attempt to situate the music and their actions within a local context, hip-hoppers are very much part of a global experience. Their allegiance to the UZHHN and a global movement means that the idea of the 'local' is tenuous, yet it remains something worth singing about. Through diverse practices such as their 'vernac', social activism and music inspired by local jazz, rappers take ownership of their place and embark on their journey of authenticity.

Unfortunately this research has taken into account only a limited view of rap music and hip-hop in the Eastern Cape, but as the first such attempt it is hoped it will add to an understanding of the local articulation of a global movement. With research on rap music and hip-hop bearing rich information on areas that are relatively easy to process into writing for publication, there remain areas wanting, with a study of rap music style, specifically South African rap music style much needed. Other areas deserving scholarly attention include but are not limited to ongoing cultural analysis of the hip-hop movement, the relationship between rap music and other music styles such as House and jazz in the Eastern Cape, its association with a religious movement such as Rastafarianism, and the relationship between hip-hop and the music industry in South Africa.

## Discography

Most of the songs I obtained from the artist are available as separate MP3 files rather than commercially available compact discs. Two commercial compact discs available from artists. They are:

- n.d. Abantu (Everyday people) *Bantustan raps*.
- n.d. Khululekani *Let me free*, Ghetto Youth Uprising.

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