

Doctor of Philosophy
in the Centre for Film and Media Studies
University of Cape Town

Remixing the tech: The digital media
ecologies of hip-hop artists from
Grahamstown, South Africa

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Word count (body): 81 971 words

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Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.
Clause 10, Chapter 2, The Constitution of South Africa

We have set out on a quest for true humanity, and somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize. Let us march forth with courage and determination drawing strength from our common plight and our brotherhood. In time, we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest possible gift – a more human face.

Biko, 1978, p. 91

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Abstract

This ethnographic study describes the digital media ecologies of hip-hop artists in the marginalised township spaces of a town in South Africa. It shows how technology appropriation here is highly contextual and linked to social context, while simultaneously informed by limited digital infrastructure that characterises marginalised communities in the Global South. In describing their social context, the study situates these young people in a post-apartheid space of entrenched racialised inequality, where unemployed black youth have very few economic prospects. Here hip-hop offers protection against despair as it allows a young person to claim a dignified sense of self, which is partly constituted through digital media competency. Through the Black Consciousness philosophy, hip-hop artists in Grahamstown become highly critical of self-defeating narratives rooted in racism, colonialism and apartheid, which often manifest in violent forms of urban masculinity. Instead they find ways to “remix” their identities by incorporating alternative notions of a successful self. These new identities foreground agency and competency, and are informed both by knowledge of African tradition and language, and newly acquired competency in entrepreneurship, artistic genres and digital skills.

The study argues that acquisition of digital skills in this space is best conceptualised through the community of practice approach, where skills development is social and linked to a sense of belonging and progress. Just as the hip-hop artists claim agency in remixing their notion of self, they also claim agency in remixing the limited digital technology available to them into various assemblages, so crafting innovative solutions to the constraints of limited and expensive digital infrastructure. Here, through a hip-hop culture that champions overcoming adversity, dysfunctional digital technology is constantly repaired and remixed. Hitherto, research on digital media use in the Global South has predominantly focused on the mobile phone in isolation. This study instead argues for the merits of a holistic digital ethnography, since observations of how these young people combine technologies such as mobile phones, computers and DVD players in everyday life, illustrate how innovation in marginalised spaces may be focused around the remixing of technology.

Dedication

The philosophy of African personhood argues that a person is the outcome of a community that helps shape that person into a moral being and a contributor to society (Gyekye, 1998). I am deeply indebted to many different people who helped shaped me as a scholar through the process of writing this dissertation. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors Marion Walton and Adam Haupt, who expertly guided me through the process with great enthusiasm, and facilitated my participation at various conferences and scholarly gatherings. I am also deeply appreciative of visiting professor Araba Sey, and my friend Marijke du Toit, who read the entire manuscript and provided valuable insights, as well as my colleague Pedro Tabensky, who commented on two of the chapters. I would also like to thank Francis Nyamnjoh, who pointed me to a range of ethnographic literature, colleague Uchenna Okeja who introduced me to the concept of African personhood, and visiting professors David Buckingham and Gerard Goggin, who made pointed comments at presentations of my work. I would also like to thank colleagues Larry Strelitz, Anthea Garman, Priscilla Boshoff, Sim Kyazze and Rod Amner for valuable support and discussions. I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without the support of my family, and would like to thank Graeme and Zaza Germond for enduring the process and generally being wonderful human beings, and my mother Mimi van der Merwe for her great sense of humour. Finally, I would like to express my most heartfelt gratitude to my young research participants. I am deeply grateful to them for welcoming me into their world, and sharing their lives, their poetry and their insightful commentary with me. I hope this dissertation will play some part in addressing the profound problems that limit the futures of such intelligent, hopeful young people.

Chapter One: Introduction

Most of the hip-hop artists in this study were ordinary out-of-school, unemployed young men from township¹ families who lived precarious lives, struggling to make ends meet and unable to enter higher education. Spending long hours huddled in a back room creating hip-hop digital media and learning new digital skills therefore seemed to have no obvious utilitarian purpose, linked to workplace or educational institutions. This suggested hip-hop's digital practices were deeply meaningful to these young people. I therefore set out to explore the meanings these young people attach to digital media production through ethnographic observations over several months. Ethnographic research enables exploratory and experiential engagement with meaning that allows for nuanced, complex research questions and findings to emerge. My previous ethnographic research in the Grahamstown "coloured area",² Hooggenoeg, revealed how young people may attach multifaceted and sometimes contradictory meanings to mobile phones, as they allowed them to challenge essentialised race and class identities, while local mobile phone practices also reinforced discourses that reproduced race and class-based inequality (Schoon, 2012a, 2012b, Schoon & Strelitz, 2014, 2016). It was through this previous research that I first observed the sophisticated digital media skills of local hip-hop artists in relation to their peers. Two hip-hop artists included in

¹ Townships are the black African residential areas which were set out under apartheid for black Africans to temporarily rent property while working in "white" towns, which they were expected to vacate on retirement to return to the "homelands", supposedly independent countries for black Africans inside the South African borders created by the apartheid state (Mabin & Smit, 1997). The post-apartheid democratic government repealed both influx control laws limiting residence in urban areas and group areas laws to determine in which parts of town people may live. While residential areas such as suburbs and the inner cities have desegregated to some extent, townships on the outskirts of urban areas have retained their racial characteristic as exclusively black spaces where the majority of working-class and unemployed black South Africans continue to live (Seekings, 2008). Grahamstown is somewhat unusual in that in the 19th century the amaFengu tribe were given title deeds to homes in Fingo Village by Queen Victoria in return for their assistance in border wars, and thus actually owned their homes (Manona, 1990). This was, however, not the case for the majority of townships surrounding the town, such as Tentyi, Hlalani, Vukani and Joza and its various extensions, until 1994. While families now own their homes, township areas remain under-resourced in terms of infrastructure (von Schnitzler, 2015). Persistent racialised inequality has meant that with the exception of very limited integration in the suburbs, Grahamstown continues to display a racialised residential character (P. M. Irvine, 2012).

² The term "coloured" is an apartheid term used to differentiate and divide black people. It referred to people who were assimilated through slavery or conquest to adopt white cultural ways and languages, and who were generally perceived to be of a "mixed race" (Adhikari, 2005). Other black South Africans, who generally speak indigenous African languages, are referred to as black Africans. "Coloureds", although also black, occupied a position of relative privilege above black Africans under apartheid, as they were given labour preference in the Cape, where they would generally be employed as artisans while black Africans would be restricted to manual work (ibid.). As this is an arbitrary apartheid construction based on essentialised understandings of race, I indicate it in inverted commas, although many still choose to identify themselves using this term.

that study had a complex grasp of the mobile internet, and a great enthusiasm for its possibilities, while the other nine young people in the study tended to restrict themselves to using mobile applications and were less adventurous in their use of the device. This prompted me to investigate this seemingly special relationship between township hip-hop artists and digital skills. I was interested in understanding whether such technical competence extended to other hip-hop artists in other townships in Grahamstown, and if so, how this could be explained. In extending my research to other black residential areas beyond Hooggenoeg, this meant engaging with young people who generally came from black families who had faced a harsher form of historical dispossession, and who also have had their mother tongue, isiXhosa, marginalised and devalued, as indeed most indigenous African languages have been devalued under colonialism and by post-colonial elites (Wa Thiong'o, 1994). I was particularly interested in the ways hip-hop artists from these spaces came to acquire digital skills, their digital learning processes, and the meanings they associated with these digital skills and how they came to have such importance in the lives of these young people.

As I teach television production at a university, I spend a considerable amount of my time teaching young people complex digital media skills. I have facilitated a range of community-orientated student media projects, where my students worked collaboratively with teenagers based in various local township schools, and these teenagers generally found it difficult to understand when students tried to explain video editing to them (Schoon, 2013). My own students, even after two years of working with similar media software in their radio course, still struggle to acquire digital video editing skills. Thus, when I ran a short video editing course for local hip-hop artists, I was mindful that this might be too ambitious, given the fact that unlike the students, the hip-hop artists only had a basic high school qualification, and many struggled to work in English. As I proceeded to explain the screen interface to the hip-hop artists and strained to retain their attention as they whispered among themselves, I worried that I had indeed set a task that was far too complex. However, when I approached the computer terminals, they had all assembled a series of images on the timeline already, and were exploring ways to insert titles and effects. I shared my surprise at the quick pace of digital learning with an older experienced hip-hop organiser, who smiled and pointed out that these hip-hop artists often spent about 12 hours working on computers every day. "So what did you expect?", he asked. This incident made clear to me how central digital learning was to local hip-hop artists, and made me wonder why they had such commitment to it when it did not seem to bring them any material advantages.

I was not only surprised by hip-hop artists' digital skills, but also by how they combined different technologies. Before I had got to know them, I had assumed that these young people were primarily engaging with digital technology through their mobile phones. In low-income black township communities in South Africa, while mobile phones are ubiquitous, computers are owned by fewer than 3% of the population (Gillwald, 2012). Yet a survey with local hip-hop artists at one of my workshops showed that 25% of them owned computers. Many shared these among each other. In the next year, I would discover how these young people combined using their mobile phones with a variety of devices, such as DVD players and a backyard computer shared among friends. The integration of mobile phones with other devices that I observed here was absent from descriptions of mobile practices of people from a low-income background in the developing world (Donner, 2015). I therefore resolved to consider the digital practices of these hip-hop artists holistically, as a digital media ecology (Horst, Herr-Stephenson, & Robinson, 2010), and to describe how it incorporated a range of devices. An holistic approach necessitated an ethnographic study to enable an integrated description of this social and technological world.

In terms of the research question, this study therefore sets out to examine the meanings of digital media practices for hip-hop artists in Grahamstown, in order to explain their seemingly sophisticated use of digital technology in comparison to other young people, both middle-class students and other township youth. It seeks to furthermore describe how mobile technology is combined with other forms of digital media technology to produce the hip-hop artists' digital media ecologies.

1.1 Hip-hop and digital practices

Hip-hop and its history of technical innovation

In explaining the digital skills of hip-hop artists in Grahamstown, one needs to acknowledge that technical innovation has been part of hip-hop culture from its early years in the USA, for example in the construction of homemade amplifiers, or playing the turntable as a musical instrument (Watkins, 2005). A simplistic assumption would be to explain the sophisticated skills of local hip-hop artists as a product of an exported hip-hop culture. As Forman (2004b, p. 389) points out, "rap music relies on the appropriation and reassignment of music technologies". The 1970s New York block party practices of hijacking city electricity connections (Forman, 2004b, p. 389) and transforming marginalised spaces characterised by brutal poverty and repressive policing into carnivalesque spaces through music events is an

example of such reassignment of technology. The usage of available technology such as spray paint, ghetto blasters and digital samplers as ways to reclaim public space marks a particular spatial appropriation through technology in hip-hop culture (Kelley, cited in Guins, 2008, p. 66). Here the temporary reclamation of space resembles De Certeau's (2011/1980) description of temporary tactics of resistance such as poaching or trespassing through which oppressed city dwellers reconceptualise public space in opposition to the planned, all-pervasive "strategies" of the powerful. De Certeau (2011/1980) described such tactics as "consuming", active reclamations of the products of commercial and state power, but nevertheless a momentarily oppositional practice, performative in nature, which leaves no trace.

The resistance tactics of the everyday (De Certeau 2011/1980) here extend also to reclaiming history through technology. From the 1970s, through incorporating samples of "breakbeats" – the rhythmic sections of older popular music from the funk era – hip-hop artists were also able to temporarily reclaim black musical history, first through deejaying and later through digital remixes (Forman, 2004b, p. 390). These digital remixes incorporating sampled music were paying homage to popular culture and akin to what Lessig (2012, p. 156) calls "young people singing the old songs on the porch". Once these commercially sampled tracks were recorded, they lost the ephemeral performative quality of the deejay event and became a tangible musical product which, in its materiality (e.g. a physical LP record), contained evidence of these infringements so that commercial recording companies could now easily prosecute such hip-hop artists (Watkins, 2005).

It is particularly "underground", non-commercial hip-hop which has appropriated digital technology and the internet, in contrast to commercial music that relies on large studios (Guins, 2008). Guins (2008, p. 69) argues that a spatial notion of the internet as a "new town square" has fuelled its appropriation by hip-hop artists. This image of the internet as a shared space is also evoked by Haupt (2008), who argues that hip-hop artists alongside hackers resist the corporate enclosure of the internet as they insist on retaining it as a shared information commons. Haupt (2014), drawing on the work of Kidd (2003), roots his critique of copyright in exposing how it can be linked to the exploitation of labour and exclusions of large sections of the population which may be historically traced to the enclosure of the commons in Britain at the onset of the industrial era. It was then that peasants lost access to communal land or "commons" on the outskirts of large feudal landholdings, purportedly to protect land from overexploitation (Kidd, 2003). In his more recent writings, Haupt (2014) shows that the concept of copyright originates in a very particular form of Western

individualised personhood, which has historically excluded the working class, women and particularly black people from ownership, and allowed corporations without any connection to the lived experience of black culture to appropriate communally shared black cultural products. While Haupt (2014) bases his arguments against copyright on critiques by music scholars of individual authorship (Alderman, 2014; Haupt, 2008; McCourt & Burkart, 2003) and follows other scholars who critique copyright (Hardt & Negri, 2005; Lessig, 2012) in also basing this argument in calls for inclusivity and equity, his emphasis on cultural ownership as rooted in shared lived experience is particularly useful. This is because it foregrounds the importance of participation and questions the lines between the production and consumption of culture that capitalism introduced.

Hip-hop's remix culture is based in a dialogic engagement with existing culture, where the lines between production and consumption of media are blurred, and creativity emerges through "generative combinatoriality" where existing cultural elements are creatively recombined (M. Irvine, 2014, p. 15). It prioritises participation over contemplation (Campanelli, 2014), and is therefore, like African notions of personhood that similarly prioritise participation (Gyekye, 1998; Menkiti, 1984), socially situated in active engagement with society. As hip-hop, despite its diverse base of participants, may be conceptualised as fundamentally rooted in African-American culture (Schloss, 2004), it is arguably inspired by surviving notions of a participatory, interactive African culture that predates slavery. In studies of digital media, the hip-hop term "remix" has now been incorporated as the defining element of these new digital participation cultures (Jenkins, 2006), illustrating that hip-hop has indeed been "ahead of the curve" (Ito et al., 2010, p. 269) in terms of developing active amateur digital production communities. Jenkins (2006) discusses how divisions between consumers and producers have collapsed through digital culture so that ordinary people now reclaim corporate products as their cultural worlds, creating new online media that rework and quote such products. I focus on the notion of the remix among hip-hop artists in Grahamstown, not only in describing how they use musical sampling, but also in their recombining of technological devices and platforms. In the findings, hip-hop artists in Grahamstown clearly express how local African cultural norms inform how they think differently about culture, technology and the creative process – as participatory and communally shared and tied to notions of communal duty. This suggests that the technological practices and innovations of local hip-hop artists are not solely informed by American hip-hop culture, but more by a remix of the local and the global.

Hip-hop remix culture has been resisted by corporations who have historically profited from appropriating and commercialising black culture, and who now try to delegitimise claims to the commons through copyright laws by accusing hip-hop artists of piracy (Haupt, 2008). The threat of prosecution for such copyright infringement is why “mixtapes” of new hip-hop tracks were circulated in the informal economy of the African-American ghetto (Watkins, 2005, p. 13). These tracks were sold from car boots and mom-and-pop record stores in poor neighbourhoods. Schur (2015) describes this distribution network outside of the formal music industry as part of hip-hop “outlaw culture”. Like the trespassers and poachers in De Certeau’s (2011/1980) writings, hip-hop “outlaw culture” was re-configuring the rules of formal cultural structures such as the music industry, and finding “tactics” for incorporating them into its world. Underground hip-hop has indeed, since the nineties, embraced “pirate” infrastructure such as P2P technology to distribute their music and get access to samples (Watkins, 2005). Chuck D from Public Enemy was the first artist from a major label who embraced the technology publicly, and defended peer-to-peer distribution to a commission of enquiry as just another technology fuelling a change in business models for the music industry (Watkins, 2005, p. 112). He was also an early adopter of the internet in 1991. The ethos of innovation in hip-hop’s culture to find new ways to interact with others may also explain its technological appropriation of mobile devices – from the pager to mobile phones to palmtop computers (Heckman, 2007, p. 176). Hip-hop artists have furthermore been early adopters of social media (boyd, 2001, p. 99), of text messaging on mobile phones (Rheingold, 2002, p. 23) and of the distribution of mobile music (May & Hearn, 2005, p.197).

While there is ample evidence of the history of technical innovation in hip-hop linked to a defiant “outlaw culture” (Schur, 2015) of consuming technology in different ways from which it was designed, this is not unique to hip-hop. Many argue that such innovative technical attitudes frequently emerge among marginalised people in postcolonial economies (Bar, Pisani, & Weber, 2007; Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014b; Sundaram, 2009). In India, for example, a grassroots technological culture in slum areas, called *jugaad*, has been celebrated for its role in innovation in digital media (Rangaswamy & Densmore, 2013). Sundaram (2009) describes such innovation as characteristic of the postcolonial city, where media divisions between producers and consumers blur, as residents respond to the constraints of decaying and inaccessible infrastructure, creating informal spaces of “pirate modernity” where media is digitally and mechanically copied in the photocopy shop, the video store and the bazaar. While piracy’s meaning may be contested in moral terms by corporate interests in

terms of copyright theft, or celebrated by cultural critics as resistance and subversion of capitalism, it can also more pragmatically be defined in terms of access: access to culture, knowledge and capital for developing countries which may create new forms of productivity, such as the Nollywood movie industry (Lobato, 2008). In the postcolonial city, the decaying infrastructure of modernity is siphoned off, expanded and made accessible through piracy to marginal communities in various technologically innovative ways (Sundaram, 2009). The dramatically expanded infrastructure of “pirate modernity” is not only used to make illicit copies, but also to spread locally made content, which rely on this infrastructure and have developed their own aesthetics based on its constraints (Larkin, 2008).

While Sundaram (2009) locates “pirate modernity” in the cities of the Global South, whose infrastructure is relied on for access to both local and global media products, one may extend his concept of “pirate modernity” to the African-American ghetto. Here too, arguably, poor, marginalised residents had limited access to affordable media infrastructure and created their own supplementary infrastructure through block parties, mom-and-pop record stores and sampled beats as forms of “outlaw culture” (Schur, 2015). This means that we can consider hip-hop’s early US history of technology appropriation as part of the emergence of a supplementary, accessible and illicit infrastructure that suited a very particular marginalised community. Locating US hip-hop’s technological innovation within a broader “pirate modernity” of marginalised urban spaces across the globe allows us to conceptualise South African hip-hop cultures of technical innovation not only as imitating their US counterparts, but responding to the local context of infrastructure constraints and access, which suggests possibilities for developing very particular local technological innovations.

Hip-hop technological practices do indeed vary, influenced by available infrastructure and resources, so that hip-hop artists in the same city may have different digital practices based on such different material constraints, as Pritchard’s (2011) study of hip-hop artists in Cape Town’s African and “coloured” townships has shown. Hip-hop artists from African townships could generally not afford recording studios or resources needed for deejaying or graffiti used by other hip-hop artists in the city, and were disadvantaged further through unequal access to transport and telecommunications infrastructure (Pritchard, 2011). The cost of airtime was a particular concern for these Cape Town hip-hop artists, and while they managed to set up social media sites such as *Facebook* and *MySpace*, these were often unresponsive as they were only accessed intermittently. There is a significant amount of literature that examines hip-hop in South Africa’s townships (Becker & Dastile, 2008; Gilmer, 2007; Hammett, 2012; Haupt, 2001; 2008; 2012; Künzler, 2011), but not much that

deals with technology or digital media. Haupt (2008; 2012) describes various digital practices of Cape Town hip-hop artists, such as sampling and remixing, producing, video production and the use of online social media, and locates these in debates related to the information commons and the agency of hip-hop artists to resist its enclosure. While my own study is heavily indebted to Haupt's (2008) ground-breaking work on hip-hop and technology in South Africa, it differs in focus and research methods as it is particularly concerned with constructing a digital ethnography (Miller & Horst, 2012) that foregrounds the meanings hip-hop artists attribute to technology. This ethnographic approach allowed me to extend Haupt's (2008) work by observing how hip-hop artists "hack" digital media production and distribution, by finding clever work-arounds to the limitations of their devices and the cost of the mobile internet, and to combine or "remix" digital devices and platforms. Pritchard's study (2011; see also Pritchard & Vines, 2013) is unique in presenting an ethnographic study of technological appropriation among hip-hop artists in South Africa. However, outside of Cape Town, no one has produced an ethnographic study of how hip-hop artists use technology in South Africa. This study's focus on a non-metropolitan marginal space therefore makes an original contribution to the literature.

In the same way as hip-hop has become localised and varied in its linguistic practices (Mitchell, 2001), we may question the existence of a universal hip-hop technological practice or disposition. While there may be a global hip-hop disposition towards technology, where hip-hop artists engage in a variety of tactics of trespassing and poaching (De Certeau, 2011/1980), and practising "outlaw culture" (Schur, 2015) in the digital realm, this may also take many different forms in different local and infrastructural contexts. Understanding the digital practices of hip-hop artists in Grahamstown requires a deeper understanding of their particular context, their understanding of hip-hop, and the role of digital devices within this digital media ecology.

Contextual hip-hop practices as digital media ecologies

The concept of "digital media ecologies" (Horst et al., 2010) provides a particularly useful holistic way to describe the dynamic interaction between people, digital media technologies, and the context of the social and cultural world of a specific place. A media ecology allows for the conceptualisation of multiple digital devices used by Grahamstown hip-hop artists and their interaction in different spaces. Across the world, particularly since the advent of the internet, the space of social interaction has changed profoundly, and the pervasiveness of

media has expanded enormously, so that it arguably makes more sense to consider media as an “environment” as opposed to specific media products to be considered in isolation (Couldry, 2012, p. 2).

Ecological metaphors for social phenomena which are central to media ecology approaches, originate in the early 20th century sociologists of the Chicago School, where urban society was conceptualised in ecological terms as made up of complex interactions and relationships between communities, urban infrastructure, and the communication media of the city such as its newspapers (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). The Chicago School, through their detailed ethnographic studies, foregrounded the importance of studying urban place, which they saw as “rooted in the habits and customs of the people who inhabit it” where such practices defined the city’s “moral and physical organisation”(Park & Burgess, 1925, p. 4). The ecological understanding of place shaped by meaningful practices of Horst et al.’s (2010) concept of media ecology are thus conceptually very similar to the Chicago School’s ecological approach to urban society, even though they are not explicitly cited. In the next decades Park et al.’s (1925) ecological concept of society based on place-bound human cultures rooted in everyday practices, would be overshadowed as the notion of “media ecologies” shifted to focus more on individuals and the world of communication technology in which they were immersed (see McLuhan, 1964; Postman, 1985, 1993). Such a media ecology was conceptualised as technologically determined (Lum, 2000), and human actors, media content or social structure had little influence on its character (Fuller, 2005, p. 3). However, as Fuller (2005, pp. 2–5) sets out, later definitions of media ecology (e.g. Guattari, 2005; Hayles, 1999) conceptualised an active role for content and social structures in shaping such ecologies. These studies did not, however, foreground the place-bound and social nature of the ecological approach to society of the Chicago School, but such social and place-bound approaches soon started to emerge in the field of information and communication studies. Information ecologies (Nardi & O’Day, 1999), which focused on computer-based information systems, considered the dynamic interaction of people, practices, values and technologies and place in a local community. This model celebrated small-scale systems as providing opportunities for interventions, but it has also been criticised for being functionalist in neglecting to include conflict and resistance originating outside of the local ecology in its model (Bowker, 2001). Foth and Hearn’s (2007) communicative ecologies are probably closest to Horst et al.’s (2010) conceptualisation of digital media ecologies, as it considers the interplay of technology, social dynamics and broader discursive meanings on a micro and macro level. However, its approach is more focused on understanding network interactions

and sociability rather than an ethnographic understanding of local digital practices. Horst et al.'s (2010) practice-based ethnographic approach seemed particularly appropriate for studying the diverse digital hip-hop practices of performance, media production and distribution. Horst's background as an anthropologist may explain the similarity in Horst et al (2010)'s approach to the Chicago School. These early twentieth century pioneers of urban ethnography were inspired by the new field of anthropology and attempted to adopt its patient methods for studying remote tribal people to study the "customs, beliefs, social practices and general conceptions of life" of urban citizens in the USA (Park & Burgess, 1925, p. 3). Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) argues that such ecological metaphors based on concepts of the urban are particularly useful in media studies to study the digital networks which constitute place-based communities and their connections to the global.

Horst et al. (2010) base their digital media ecologies approach in earlier social constructivist approaches for conceptualising dynamic relationships between media technologies and social contexts: the Social Construction Of Technology (SCOT) (Pinch & Bijker, 1987), digital media anthropology (Miller & Horst, 2012; Miller & Slater, 2000) and the domestication approach (Silverstone, Hirsch, & Morley, 1992). All of these models resist assumptions that processes of adopting technologies should necessarily be "rational, linear, mono-causal and technologically determined" (Berker, Hartmann, Punie, & Ward, 2006, p. 1). One may understand the use of digital technology as a process of meaning-making in material culture, where the township hip-hop artists construct an identity through technology during the process of "objectification" (Miller & Slater, 2000). The concept of objectification refers to a dynamic process of meaning-making based in the relationship between persons and things, which enables the development of material culture (Miller, 1987). It draws on the Hegelian understanding of subjectivity construction through a cycle of differentiation and sublation: in differentiation the person recognises the object as a separate entity, and through sublation, this object again becomes part of that person's identity and world of meaning (Miller, 1987, pp. 29–30). This dynamic process of meaning-making co-constitutes people, objects and meanings, and enables human beings to recognise themselves in a technology and, through it, to embrace particular values, practices and identities, thus moulding the technology to fit culturally specific purposes (Miller & Slater, 2000). Media technologies are very particular objects as they not only convey meanings as cultural objects, but also through the media content they enable, and are thus "doubly articulated" (Silverstone et al., 1992, p. 13).

Silverstone et al. (1992) conceptualise this meaning-making process as being situated in the borders between private and public space, and focus their research on the home, exploring the meanings digital objects acquire as they cross over from the commercial spaces of the factory and the shopfloor and become part of the domestic, intimate world of a family. Various other studies have indeed applied the domestication approach outside of the home, in social spaces such as offices and institutions, where they could apply its focus on changing meanings of technology over time as devices are appropriated differently over their lifecycles (Haddon, 2006). However, none of these studies have questioned the assumptions in Silverstone et al.'s (1992) research of the implied universal nature and meaning of public/private divides in all societies. Other scholars have indeed shown how the meaning of privacy is not constant and has developed historically through the establishment of the middle class (Garland-Thomson, 2009) and is understood differently in different societies across the world (Rotenberg & McDonogh, 1993). Biko (1978, p. 41) suggests that African societies have different notions of privacy where intimacy is not restricted to a select group of friends as in bourgeois Western society, and suggests that African patterns of social interaction instead prescribe an intimacy of interaction between cohorts of people of the same age and gender engaged in particular types of labour. While it makes sense to analyse a British village and its appropriation of digital devices in terms of the very pronounced divisions between public and private for the English (Miller, 2016), the domestication approach's deeply contextual notions of technology appropriation should, I believe, involve contextualising notions of private and public, and should not make assumptions about the nature of specific spaces like the family home in relation to privacy. I did, however, find the domestication approach's focus on the constantly developing meanings of digital devices over their lifecycles useful to understanding the social space of the backyard "studio" and how digital devices are "domesticated" into this space, even though it was clear that notions of private and public here were informed by very different meanings than Silverstone et al.'s (1992) British homes. Decoupling the domestication approach from fixed notions of a private/public domestic divide is therefore a significant contribution of this study.

Many social constructivist studies of technology, in their enthusiasm to show how social context is related to practices, and in wanting to resist technologically determinist arguments, have neglected to show how meanings and practices may be co-constituted by infrastructure and digital materiality (Lievrouw, 2014). Horst et al.'s (2010) media ecology approach, for example, does not include an extensive interrogation of available media infrastructure, and does not focus on the types of devices people have access to, nor

breakages or repairs, nor how such materialities affect digital practices and their meanings, even though they do recognise that access to computers and the internet were not universal in the homes of the teens they studied (Horst et al., 2010, p. 30; Ito et al., 2010, pp. 180–182). One of the contributions of this study is therefore to broaden Horst et al.’s (2010) notion of media ecology to also include a more focused consideration of infrastructure and materiality. Lievrouw (2014) argues that including a focus on the “affordances” of different infrastructures and devices provides an opportunity to pay close attention to the materiality of technology while also emphasising social meanings.

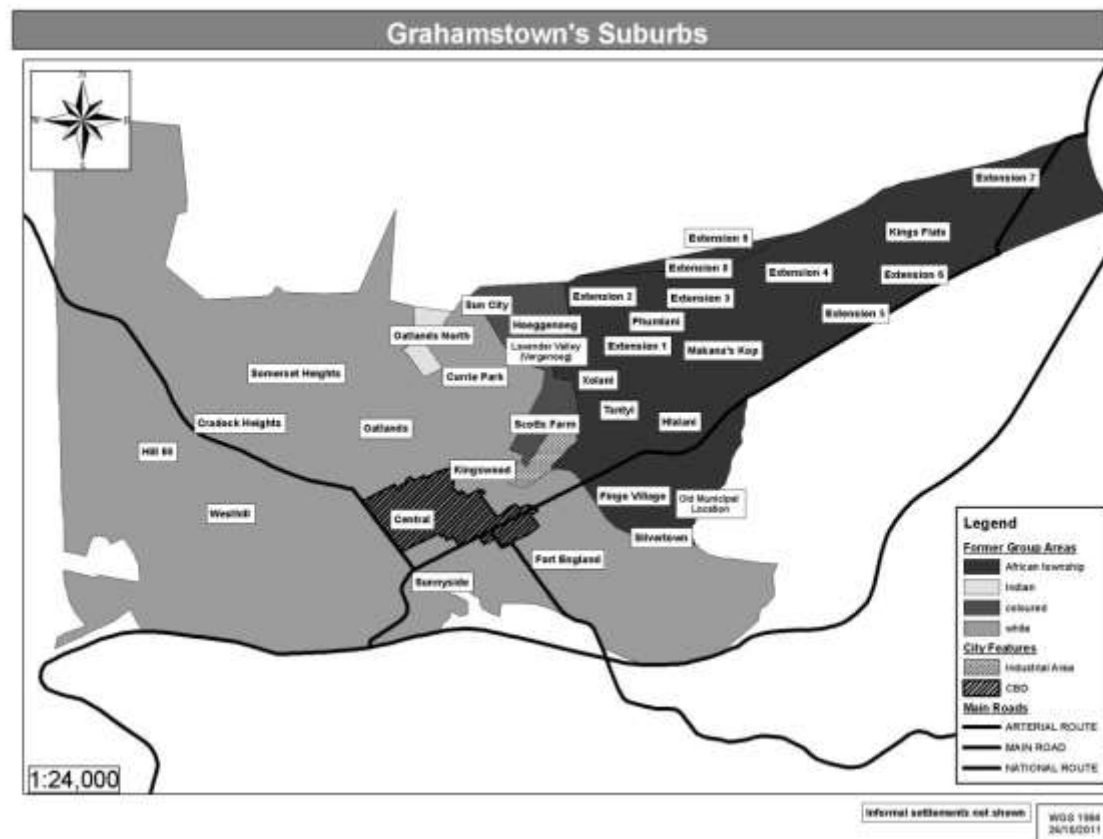
The concept of “affordances” was first articulated by Gibson (1979) in describing visual perception, describing “affordances” as characteristics that are not inherent to an object, medium or surface, but defined in relation to animals or humans through the possible actions they “afford” each species, affordances which animals and humans are generally evolved to perceive, but sometimes misperceive. Norman (1990; 1999), a designer, popularised the concept of affordances for manufactured objects by arguing that designers should use the principles of human psychology to make the affordances of objects visible and thus facilitate usability³. These above definitions, however, assume that the affordances of objects are predefined in a fixed list of functions and determined by the object in relation to universal biological or psychological laws. Therefore, Lievrouw (2014), a critic of technological determinism and a firm proponent of the co-constitution of digital practices by both technological and social factors, argues for Hutchby’s (2001) use of the term.

Hutchby (2001, p. 450, my emphasis) defines affordances of objects more loosely as a “range of possibilities for interpretation and action”, thus arguing for the influence of material features of artefacts on use, while resisting technological determinism by allowing use to emerge from interpretation, thus acknowledging that to some degree a technological object may be read as a text (Grint & Woolgar, 1997). In this way he is able to critique Grint and Woolgar’s (1997, pp. 72–73) assertion that in principle a technological device may be read in any possible manner, by pointing to the very different affordances of bridges and aeroplanes. Conceptualising affordances as a the range of possibilities supported by the material properties of a device, Hutchby (2001) shows that some uses may be privileged through design and marketing or “written” into the device, and the device may indeed be “read” differently by various sets of users who could each perceive different affordances

³ In his initial manuscript, Norman (1990) conflated affordances and their perception, but corrected this in a later work by distinguishing between “real” and “perceived affordances” (Norman, 1999, p. 39)

within this available range. However, material properties still constrain use so that a bridge will never “afford” for it to be used as an aeroplane. Rappert (2003) critiques Hutchby (2001) by calling into question his focus on the everyday as opposed to large sociopolitical technological concerns, and points out that many other social constructivists have indeed acknowledged some role for the material properties of artefacts. I find in Hutchby’s (2001) use of affordances a clear analytical category for my research that allows interrogating the constraints on everyday digital practices imposed by old, second-hand devices and limited bandwidth, while also acknowledging the influence of social context on such digital practices. In this study I thus examine how the affordances of the devices and infrastructures the hip-hop artists use, may constrain and enable digital practices. A focus on infrastructure is particularly important in a deeply unequal country like South Africa, as inequalities and inclusion are frequently built into the uneven and differential distribution of infrastructure (von Schnitzler, 2015).

1.2 Young people in South Africa's townships



The historically black African townships of Grahamstown,⁴ Fingo Village, Tanti, Hlalani and Joza with its various extensions are collectively known as Grahamstown East, or by their African name of eRhini. eRhini historically excludes the historically “coloured” areas⁵ of Grahamstown due to the legacy of apartheid town planning, even though black “coloured” families often live under similarly precarious material conditions (STATSSA, 2011). Both the townships and “coloured areas” are characterised by small brick homes with corrugated iron shack outbuildings, outside taps and toilets and dusty streets, very different from the leafy suburbs with their Victorian homes which are still mostly populated by white Grahamstown residents. Approximately two decades after apartheid ended, Grahamstown

⁴ Recently a proposal has been submitted to change the name of Grahamstown to Makhanda, but at the time of this study this had not yet been approved by the relevant legal channel, which is why I still refer to the original name.

⁵ There is little quantitative research available for Grahamstown’s “coloured” areas besides recent census statistics.

generally retains its racially segregated character, with minimal integration in terms of housing or social interaction (P. M. Irvine, 2012).

Nowadays, the town as a whole has a population of about 70 000 people with 78% of the population being black African (STATSSA, 2011). The township areas remain poor. A recent Grahamstown survey based in two areas in the townships of eRhini showed that 73% of households received social grants⁶ and 36% had no employed person in the household (Mukorombindo & Coetzee, 2013). While official unemployment statistics are 35%, when one considers those who have given up looking for work and those who are economically inactive, only 45% of adults are employed (STATSSA, 2011). A local survey shows that, as in other South African townships, women in eRhini are increasingly becoming household heads and breadwinners (Mukorombindo & Coetzee, 2013). Most residents of eRhini reported a decline in satisfaction with their living circumstances, despite their increase in material wealth owing to grants and free housing, relating this to the lack of employment possibilities in the town (Møller & Radloff, 2010). At the same time, crime remains unacceptably high. A local survey of the eRhini area reveals that 12% of the respondents had experienced a serious crime such as murder, rape or assault affecting someone in their household in the past year, while 23% had endured a break-in at their home (Møller & Radloff, 2010).

Ironically it is now able-bodied young people in South Africa who are increasingly dependent on the old and the infirm (Bähre, 2011). As social grants are skewed towards the elderly and women, this has placed particular stress on younger unemployed men who are unable to fulfil culturally prescribed roles as providers (Mosoetsa, 2011, p. 7). Four out of ten young South Africans between the ages of 18 and 24 are neither employed nor in education or training (Cloete, 2009). At the age of 24, those who have not yet had a job are unlikely to have formal employment in their lifetime (National Planning Commission, 2011). While government has promoted entrepreneurship as an alternative path out of poverty, most of the small businesses set up by young micro-entrepreneurs are survivalist in character, and make up a very small percentage of unemployed youth in the age group, rather insignificant in size (Kane-Berman, 2015, p. 16). As half of the South African population is now made up of young people under 24 (Kane-Berman, 2015, p. 1), these statistics paint a bleak future not only for young people, but also for the country as a whole.

⁶ In South Africa, social grants are provided for indigent persons in the form of child grants, disability grants and old-age pensions. There is no dole or unemployment grant.

1.3 The argument – understanding the digital media practices of hip-hop artists

This dissertation's contribution is in situating digital hip-hop practices in Grahamstown within a broader search for meaning by these young people, who struggle to make sense of the desperate circumstances they face daily, and the structural disadvantages that foreclose their possibilities for social mobility and a viable future. I argue that their social position as predominantly unemployed poor black township youth is legitimated by the dominant discourses that underpin symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989), and that justifies the extreme racialised inequalities in South African society, which robs them and their peers of dignity and self-worth. The symbolic meanings that have dehumanised black South Africans under slavery, colonialism and apartheid still prevail and have been compounded by neo-liberalism which has defined the masses of unemployed as waste (Mbembe, 2011). Digital hip-hop practices, I contest, are directly related to a broader quest for humanity, dignity and self-worth, and the agency to both transform the violent nihilism of one's community and overcome one's circumstances to find a path towards social mobility. These powerful social imaginaries allow hip-hop artists to transcend to some degree the hardship, helplessness and despair endemic to their township environment, and to craft new identities in which they may claim ability and ingenuity.

Such identities are developed, I show, as hip-hop artists gradually embrace the values and meanings associated with the Grahamstown hip-hop "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as new members are socialised into its social world of meaning. Through the community of practice's values of black consciousness (Biko, 1978), hip-hop artists are able to examine the ways in which black people have been made to feel inferior, and to reclaim dignity and humanity for poor black township residents by celebrating everyday township resilience, African culture and the isiXhosa language. Grahamstown hip-hop culture situates itself within the global "conscious" hip-hop movement, which is informed by identities of the self as activist, artist and entrepreneur and expressed through digital practices (Guins, 2008), identities which are therefore also on offer for these young people to incorporate within their identities. Hip-hop practices are here not only meaningful in terms of the quest for dignity, but should also be understood in terms of trying to imagine a possible future and social mobility. As hip-hop artists gradually progress towards increased legitimacy in the town's hip-hop community of practice by learning and mastering various digital practices, they

interpret such progress in terms of their potential to succeed and achieve social mobility in broader society. Thus, they develop a powerful impetus to continue developing new forms of digital ingenuity particularly suited to overcoming the constraints of infrastructure and digital materiality in this environment. Such ingenuity is not only situated in displaying individual potential, but in a social commitment to assist others and spread their hip-hop message in order to transform society and build the sense of self-worth and dignity of the entire township community, as well as black South Africans in general.

The struggle for dignity

In the townships of Grahamstown, unemployed hip-hop artists are constantly made aware of themselves as “useless” through discourses that circulate in this space, associating their lack of “style” with their inferior status. Such discourses should be tied to the broader discourses of legitimization of inequality or symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989) in South African society. Here hip-hop artists are thus given low status because of their lack of a specific type of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986b), “style”, where such style is not only a question of taste, but of the available material resources. Symbolic power masks how success is tied to unfair material advantage by conveying status based on the cultural capital associated with the powerful, such as educational qualifications, cultural objects, dispositions and tastes which are only realisable for those with material means and powerful social connections or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986b). Hip-hop artists still, however, retain faith in the “meritocracy myth” (McNamee & Miller, 2004), believing that those who work hard and are talented will achieve social mobility. Like other township youth (Swartz, 2009), they blamed their failures on their own abilities instead of the structural violence they were subject to. Such structural violence which forecloses opportunities, combined with the symbolic violence that legitimises it, leads to a nihilistic, violent masculinity in the township. Hip-hop artists understood such violence in terms of black consciousness rooted in a sense of inferiority and anger and “brokenness” born from seeing the self through the eyes of the oppressor (Biko, 1978). They tried to resist this by holding on to their own beliefs in a future for themselves. However, this positive attitude often provoked aggressive reactions in some of their peers, the “haters” or “gossipers”, who saw their optimistic disposition as illegitimate and a provocation drawing attention to their own hopeless situation. In chapter 3, such a township subjectivity of hopelessness or “habitus of the hood” (Richardson & Skott-Myhre, 2012) is unpacked and made sense of in terms of various theoretical concepts such as habitus (Bourdieu, 1995),

internalisation of racial domination (Fanon, 2008/1952), and the hidden injuries of class (Sennett & Cobb, 1972).

Remixing the self from worthless to worthy

Hip-hop in Grahamstown responds directly to such hopelessness by trying to counter it through developing a sense of self-worth. This is done by situating their own worth in their relationship with others, where they focus on their ability to give younger men or “younger brothers” advice, through hip-hop, on how to conduct themselves and to escape adopting a violent masculinity. The hip-hop artists would frequently differentiate themselves from white people or middle class black people fluent in English or “Model Cs”⁷, by emphasising their connectedness to the community and their respect for others. This relational sense of self-worth that conceptualises the community as an ideal family is arguably informed by ideas of African personhood which foregrounds the person’s obligation towards the development of others in their community, and identifies social status in terms of the social network one is able to mobilise (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998). The important emphasis here is not to construct an essentialist African subject with radically different ways of seeing and being to Western persons, but rather to present this emphasis on others as an aspect of identity and thus a shifting cultural concept (Hall, 1992) as well as to further problematise and provincialise Western bourgeois individualism and its disconnect from other people and the environment (Chakrabarty, 2009). Individual agency is indeed very much a feature of traditional African personhood alongside communal obligation, and modern Africans also frequently combine elements from more traditional communal notions of the person with particular Western aspects of individual identity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998). These hip-hop artists thus also incorporated identities which were based in individual brilliance, such as that of the intellectual, the artist, the professional and the entrepreneur, to claim a status situated in competence. Through such identities, hip-hop artists situated competence not only in mastering digital practices, but also in expressing the value of local cultural capital that is not valued in wider society: the complex wielding of isiXhosa poetic expression, deep knowledge of traditional culture, and the knowledge of strategies needed to survive under difficult material circumstances. As hip-hop is a practice that is underpinned by

⁷ Model C schools are suburban schools that used to only accommodate white children during apartheid, but are now open to all children provided their parents can afford the costly school fees, which allow them to afford a much smaller student-teacher ratio. Many working township parents send their children to such schools.

African American values despite its diverse make-up (Schloss, 2004), this explains the similar notions of communal obligation to the neighbourhood that emerges in hip-hop culture.

The notion of self as enterprise has become increasingly dominant in the current era of neoliberalism, and positions the self not in a relationship with the state as a rights-bearing citizen, but as an enterprise responsible for its own marketing and constant self-improvement in a relationship with the market, where it needs to constantly compete with others to survive (Makovicky, 2014; Martin, 2000; N. Rose, 1990). Hip-hop artists seem to conceptualise themselves in terms of constructs of neoliberal personhood by considering themselves as brands that needed to be marketed, and describing themselves in terms of progress, growth and success. The various notions of personhood that the hip-hop artists use to constitute themselves and “remix” their identities are set out in greater detail in chapter 4 of the dissertation.

Notions of progress through a community of practice

How are hip-hop artists able to escape the “broken” subjectivity of the township and remix their identity from worthless to worthy? The community of practice approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991), abbreviated as CoP, shows how people may gradually refashion their identities through engaging in meaningful practices in a socially situated learning environment. I argue that the hip-hop artists in Grahamstown should be conceptualised as a community of practice, as it is a group of people engaged in a mutual endeavour (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). In striving for legitimacy and belonging, new members develop a trajectory towards mastering particular practices, and in this process gradually transform their identities as they internalise the meanings and values associated with such practices in this community (Wenger, 2010). In the hip-hop community, such values are a rejection of violent masculinities, and a celebration of African culture and languages, the intellect, professionalism, and entrepreneurship. As in other CoPs, the hip-hop community has at its centre various “masters” who may confer degrees of legitimacy on members who learn and attempt to master particular practices central to this community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the hip-hop community, such increasing legitimacy can be produced through improving digital skills, and the trajectory towards full membership and being a master or “hip-hop head” is often described in terms of “professionalism”. Progress along the trajectory towards legitimacy in the hip-hop CoP is generally considered to be a sign of potential success in

broader society. For young people who have hardly any opportunities for social mobility, such promise of progress is a driving force which propels them to continuously master new digital practices. The sense of legitimacy and incorporation into situated social learning was more difficult for young female hip-hop artists to achieve, not only due to the gendered nature of spaces of hip-hop learning, but also because of the orientation of hip-hop towards addressing issues of masculinity. Hip-hop had generally adopted a gender-typical masculine “subculture” (Tannen, 1982) which privileged competition and public verbal aggression, and thus did not necessarily make women feel comfortable. Within the CoP, hip-hop artists constantly competed with each other, through a process I have labelled digital distinction, where comparisons contesting their superior digital practices are constantly articulated. The relationship between learning, status and gender in a CoP, and how this can be applied to Grahamstown hip-hop is further unpacked in chapter 6.

The meanings of digital technology practices

In describing the digital media ecology of Grahamstown hip-hop, the context of the social and cultural world described above allows one to make sense of the hip-hop artists’ digital media practices (Horst et al., 2010). In outlining the meanings of these different digital practices, the dissertation focuses on three different spaces, and the dominant technologies in these spaces. It firstly considers the “cypher”, a hip-hop performance space where newcomers are socialised into the values of the community of practice. In becoming a hip-hop artist through the cypher, new members are able to claim and display belonging through various digital media practices associated with the mobile phone. The mobile phone also allows entry into the CoP through various online networking tools that enable them to insert themselves into such communities.

The second space is that of the digital backyard studio, where hip-hop artists extended their digital skills and progressed towards learning the skills for becoming a “producer”, a technical trajectory which allowed the hip-hop artist to move towards the centre of the community to achieve legitimacy. Here the focus is on the yard computer, a communally shared computer in the backyard studio on which hip-hop media was created. Yard socialisation is common in South African townships, where the yard is the communal space between various shack outbuildings around the main house (Bank, 2011).

The final space is the digitally networked spaces of hip-hop media distribution, which include the offline networks of distribution in the township, through Bluetooth and the yard

computer, as well as online networks created through mobile applications such as *WhatsApp*, WAP sites and social media platforms. Here the focus is on the mobile internet. In this space of hip-hop distribution, hip-hop artists visualise their recognition within the broader hip-hop CoP of South Africa, and in some cases the global hip-hop CoP.

Ingenuity and the materiality of digital technology in the township

In describing a digital media ecology, it is important to also consider its third component, since beyond people and social context, there is also the technology itself. In the developing world, it is imperative that issues of breakages and repair and limited or unaffordable infrastructure are prioritised in studies of technology (Larkin, 2008). Here the concept of affordances, which enable or restrain particular uses in particular contexts (Hutchby, 2001), needs to be taken into account. In Grahamstown's townships, mobile phones were ubiquitous, while computers were quite rare. This meant that the computer was often conceptualised by hip-hop artists as a mobile phone "upgrade" and its affordances were read in terms of mobile phone affordances. New computer users here would, for example, express a desire to use software like they had been doing on their mobile phones. In the context of the hot and overcrowded backyard shack with its irregular electricity flows, the computer's unintended affordances included constantly breaking. Due to its frequent breakdowns, combined with its affordances of accessible modular design and ease of disassembly, the computer here could be considered to invoke the desire for its repair or "broken world thinking" (Jackson, 2014, p. 221). Learning to repair a computer thus became part of the practices of what I call "digital distinction" through which hip-hop artists could demonstrate their worth through competence. Computer repair also provided a communal sense of worth as hip-hop artists became able to fix one another's computers.

Since hip-hop artists did not own smartphones that could tether a computer to the internet, they worked around the limited affordances of their feature phones by developing a two-step internet process. This involved connecting the feature phone to the mobile internet and in a separate step, transferring media through the mobile phone memory card from and to the computer. In this way they combined or "remixed" the affordances of the feature phone, the mobile memory card and the computer to create a new hybrid assemblage (Latour, 2005) which afforded the production and distribution of social media. Such innovative construction of hybrid assemblages also extended online, where hip-hop artists combined or "remixed" the affordances of *Facebook* with an extremely data-lite media uploading site, *Datafilehost*, so

creating a hybrid music distribution space online, which had the affordances of a mainstream social media site (boyd, 2008), but with very low data costs. *Datafilehost* may be considered a “grey” platform (Lobato & Thomas, 2014), part of the informal economies of digital distribution where it was not clear whether its use was legitimate or part of black market activities. It was similar to the platform *MegaUpload*, which has been implicated in copyright evasion, in that it required no identifying logins for the transfer of media files. Thus, as in other postcolonial contexts with limited and unaffordable infrastructure, the media distribution of marginal artists occurred on such platforms associated with media piracy (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a; Sundaram, 2009). This usage of such platforms calls into question the framing of media piracy in terms of copyright evasion, and situates it within a frame of access to media and access to distribution infrastructure (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a; Lobato, 2014).

Distributing content on marginal platforms such as *Datafilehost* does, however, place such content outside of the mainstream social media environment and calls into question arguments that have emphasised how ICTs may promote inclusivity in the media through digital media production (Burgess, 2006; Couldry, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). Such inclusivity is seen to emerge through a “participatory culture” of digital media production which allows ordinary users to challenge mainstream media by actively contributing to popular culture themselves, which promotes grassroots creativity (Jenkins, 2006). Several scholars have, however, questioned the claims of agency and power Jenkins (2006) promotes (Carpentier, 2011; Couldry, 2011; Hay & Couldry, 2011; Schäfer, 2011; Verstraete, 2011). Indeed, in his more recent writings, Jenkins (2014) emphasises the power of entrenched media industries to dominate media flows, but still argues for the importance of user-generated content as a way of speaking back to such powerful institutions. The scholars clearly demonstrate, as Jackson (2014) argues, a fixation on productivist notions of creativity and resistance, while ignoring more communal notions of creativity seated in maintenance and repair, as well as the importance of being creative in reconceptualising distribution (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a). Circulating hip-hop media on *Datafilehost* meant that it was mainly accessible to those who had access to the download link, primarily the township hip-hop communities who circulated such links via *Facebook* pages and *WhatsApp*. The creativity of conceptualising such a distribution strategy did, however, mean that such content was accessible to people with very limited access to data. As the networks of offline digital media file distribution (e.g. via *Bluetooth*) mirrored the dense social networks that characterised the townships, this meant that online media transfer between different towns could be described as translocal, as each

file sent to an individual in another town was effectively inserted into this localised distribution network, so connecting townships with each other. An important contribution of this study is therefore to conceptualise hip-hop distribution as translocal as it creates direct digital connections between different townships, and thus forms a media network outside of the dominant media flows that originate in South Africa's affluent cities. Such creation of new translocal inter-township flows and spaces of sociability demonstrate how technological materiality may at times constitute the social context, as the relationship between digital technology and social context is dynamic, where each constitutes the other (See Horst & Miller, 2006).

1.4 Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two shows how I have developed an ethnographic method that is grounded in my background as a documentary filmmaker, and in a dialogical approach (Tedlock, 1987) where the hip-artists participate in the analysis. In working with hip-hop artists to make music videos and offering software support I tried to implement my belief that research should not simply be a process of extracting data from a community, but should, as Swartz (2011) argues, also involve giving something back. I explain how my research started off using action research methods in formal training workshops and moved towards a more informal process of participant observation, hanging out and working with hip-hop artists. In this chapter, I recognise the limitations of my social position as a white middle-class woman with very limited isiXhosa competence, and unpack how I have developed strategies to mitigate this. My use of the camera as research tool illustrates how it can be used to build rapport with a hip-hop community that values digital media skills, but also introduces its own dynamics. I further engage with issues of voice and visibility, and the ethical responsibility of doing research with marginalised artists hungry for recognition, and how this complicates standard research concerns over anonymity.

Chapter Three describes the social world of Grahamstown's townships and the impact it has on the subjectivity of young people. It shows how inequalities are legitimised, resulting in constant attacks on the sense of worth of poor black unemployed youth like the hip-hop artists. Here structural violence results in extreme deprivation that translates into a violent everyday culture where crime and alcohol are ubiquitous. Nevertheless, hip-hop artists oppose such discourses, and conceptualise possibilities for their own social mobility. This chapter shows how hip-hop artists resist violent masculinity as well as the aggressive verbal

put-downs which are aimed at those who hang onto hope and attempt community projects or any form of social mobility. The hip-hop artists situate their response to such aggression in terms of black consciousness, which allows them to empathise with such “broken” youth, but also to criticise them for internalising their own oppression. This chapter unpacks what such internalised oppression means following theorists like Bourdieu, Fanon, and Sennett and Cobb, so attempting to develop a theoretical model for township subjectivity.

Chapter Four shows how hip-hop artists resisted internalised oppression through a variety of methods. Firstly, they conceptualise their own worth in terms of their role in helping others in the community, so affirming the values of African personhood, and their own value through such relationships. They furthermore situated their own worth within broader African cultures and the isiXhosa language, and engaged in a number of strategies to champion these, thus challenging the dominant cultural capital in South Africa which attributes these very little worth. Finally, hip-hop artists claimed a range of individual notions of excellence generally denied to black persons, particularly working-class black persons, such as the identity of the intellectual, the artist, the professional and the entrepreneur. The latter two identities are entangled with capitalist discourses, which means that hip-hop artists engaged in a process of negotiation in which they both challenged and became entangled in these discourses. This chapter therefore describes how hip-hop artists “remix” their sense of self from worthless to worthy, and become young people who claim the agency to fashion a path to upliftment for themselves and their community. This sets the scene for future chapters that will show how digital media practices are always situated within these broader practices of reconstituting the self and the community.

Chapter Five explains the process through which hip-hop artists are able to gradually transform their own subjectivity, despite the powerful symbolic forces that create internalised oppression. This explanation is based in defining Grahamstown hip-hop as a community of practice. The CoP concept provides a model for how identity may be gradually reconstituted through practice, where each member does so by crafting a trajectory towards full membership by mastering various practices that encapsulate the values of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2010). This chapter describes the hip-hop space of public performance, the cypher, as a key site in which newcomers are recruited into the community and start performing its practices. It also conceptualises the mobile phone as an entry point into the CoP, as the site where the newcomers’ digital media practices may be performed, and through which newcomers may form ties with the community through social networking. The values and identities central to hip-hop, such as self-worth, celebrating African culture, and

professionalism, are given meaning in terms of digital practices. Gradually mastering practices that are more complex and closer to the centre of this CoP are shown to provide hip-hop artists with a sense of progress, and such progress becomes meaningful to them in terms of their own hopes of social mobility.

Chapter Six describes the backyard hip-hop studio as a site of alternative hip-hop masculinity, and situates the yard computer within the meanings associated with this space. The chapter shows how digital practices in the yard are informed by the different understandings of the self through which the hip-hop artists constitute themselves, such as the sharing culture informed by African personhood, and notions of professionalism and entrepreneurship. The backyard's sharing culture means that it can be considered in relation to the sharing concept of the commons (Haupt, 2008; Kidd, 2003). In the backyard studio, hip-hop artists learn advanced skills from each other, and learning happens through mobilising social networks. Young women tend to be absent from the backyard bedroom studio, policing their reputations by avoiding male spaces, which tends to exclude them from digital learning practices. In the backyard studio, hip-hop artists may eventually transform themselves into "producers", as they increasingly demonstrate more advanced skills and are able to differentiate themselves from others through a process of digital distinction. These advanced digital skills extend to computer repair, necessitated by constant breakages. It is indeed the limitations of materiality, infrastructure and constant breakages that drive hip-hop artists to develop practices of innovation and making-do. Through the internet, hip-hop artists are in some cases able to collaboratively produce music with remote others through virtual versions of the digital backyard. However, owing to bandwidth limitations this often means that quality is compromised.

Chapter Seven focuses on processes of distribution and the objectification of the self into networks extending across space and time through the digital gifting of hip-hop media files. In this space, due to the struggles to find affordable data-light access to the internet, new practices emerge where hip-hop artists combine or "remix" the affordances of different devices and platforms to make this possible. The two-step internet connections of computers to the mobile internet, mediated by the mobile memory card, and innovative ways of using Facebook, WhatsApp and the grey platform *Datafilehost*, are examples of such innovation. Hip-hop artists insert themselves into urban spaces of elsewhere through their digital presence, and imagine themselves moving towards centres of economic power in South Africa and the world, tied to new promises of social mobility. Due to the nature of the grey infrastructure they use, they tend, however, to remain on the margins, and mainly connect

with other marginalised township spaces, creating a translocal network of hip-hop across the region.

The final chapter considers how various concepts and assumptions used in this study, such as communities of practice, digital media ecologies, and the use of mobile phones in the Global South can be questioned and extended. This chapter affirms the value of situating media practices within broader social practices (Couldry, 2004), and summarises how this study has situated hip-hop media practices within young people's practices of maintaining a sense of dignity and hope in their lives. It calls for a change of direction in the CoP field from its focus on corporate learning, towards issues of knowledge and inequality in broader society. It critiques the assumed divisions of private/public in the domestication approach, and the lack of chronology in the digital media ecologies approach, and so extends both models. This chapter highlights how expanding the focus on the mobile phone in the Global South to a broader consideration of how various digital devices may be combined, open up the possibility to observe how marginalised people create new assemblages or innovatively remix the technology. The chapter concludes by pointing out how engaging with young people in a dialogical approach around the dilemmas they face, and so understanding their social world in a meaningful way, may arguably be more useful than functionalist approaches that try to measure various social forces in their lives.

Chapter Two: Constructing a digital ethnography

How can one explain Grahamstown's hip-hop artists' advanced digital media skills relative to other young people living in townships in this town? What are the meanings of digital media practices for hip-hop artists in this environment? More specifically, what is the relationship between the social world of meaning of Grahamstown hip-hop, the materiality of digital artefacts and infrastructure, and the artists' hip-hop practices? The multi-faceted research methodology that I used to find answers to these questions made central use of the concept "digital media ecologies", which emphasises the dynamic interactions that occur in a "technical, social, cultural and place-based system", so linking the digital practices of young people to "structural conditions, infrastructures of place and technologies" (Horst et al., 2010, p. 31). This is thus an approach that avoids technological determinism and recognises the dynamic relationship between different elements, whether social, technological or geographical. An investigation of such a dynamic environment that constitutes a digital media ecology therefore has to involve in-depth exploration of the relationship between these different elements.

Documenting such highly contextual, relational processes requires a holistic methodology that is attuned to detailed description and interpretation, simultaneously collecting qualitative data on subjective experiences, media practices and digital material artefacts and infrastructure. The description of meaningful social worlds requires a research method that is phenomenological in nature, such as ethnography, in order to make sense of the social constructs that constitute it (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster, & Prozesky, 2002, p. 28). Deeply contextual, cross-platform ethnographic studies of digital media usage have become increasingly common in recent years (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2013) as scholars became more aware of how various media practices are embedded within everyday life (see Couldry, 2004).

Digital media ethnography has roots in both anthropology and media studies. It draws from the ethnographic tradition developed by Malinowski in anthropology to craft highly detailed descriptions of specific contexts produced through the collection of rich data through extended experience in the field (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2013). It is these details that allow the scholar to refute "narrow presumptions about the universality of digital experience" (Coleman, 2010, p. 489). Digital ethnographies that focus on the everyday cross-platform use of media devices, such as this study, developed out of the domestication approach in media studies (Silverstone et al., 1992). The initial domestication studies focused on various media

technologies such as computers and televisions within the contexts of a home and how they were appropriated into the culture or “moral economy” of these households (Silverstone et al., 1992), but this method can be extended to other spaces and their moral economies (Haddon, 2006). As the internet became part of popular culture, the early internet ethnographies or “virtual ethnographies” (Hine, 2000) did not observe people’s interaction with media technology in everyday life, but instead focused on textual interactions or “life on the screen” (See Turkle, 1997), where the internet was found to enable a postmodern identity play that totally disrupted “offline” identities (Press & Livingstone, 2006). Miller and Slater’s (2000) study shattered these earlier assumptions of online space as separate and distinct from the practices of everyday life and ushered in digital ethnography’s new phase, “connective ethnography”, which adopted a holistic approach and examined the links manifested on specific media platforms in a specific context (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2013, p. 6). My study draws particularly on both the domestication approach and “connective ethnography” to construct a digital ethnography of hip-hop artists in Grahamstown and their very particular digital media ecologies.

Digital ethnographies have often focused on dynamic processes of meaning-making, interrogating how digital practices mediate social meanings and how social meanings in turn redefine ways of using digital technology (see Horst & Miller, 2006; Miller & Horst, 2012). Socially situated studies of technology, however, need to go beyond phenomenological concerns and engage more robustly with technological materiality to develop a truly holistic description of these dynamic relationships (Lievrouw, 2014). I have highlighted issues of meaning in relation to the affordances (Hutchby, 2001) of various technologies and infrastructures, for example in my linking of the personal computer’s modular design to a culture of repair that draws on notions of African personhood. This unpacking of the “black box” to examine the materialities of particular technological devices or infrastructures resists the essentialism of talking about “the mobile phone” or “the internet”, and allows for a more accurate examination of technologies in context, such as understanding the affordances of the mobile feature phone in a township (Walton & Donner, 2012) or the 2G mobile internet in a developing country (Donner, 2015). It allows for a more differentiated examination of the dynamic relationship between the social and the technological: How do the specific affordances of digital objects and infrastructures enable particular interpretations and new digital practices in a social environment? (For a study that engages with this question, see Magaudda, 2011.) In describing the digital media ecology of hip-hop in Grahamstown, I therefore also pay attention to issues of materiality of technology and infrastructure.

2.1 Digital media ethnography and the politics of knowledge production in post-apartheid Grahamstown

The crisis in anthropology in the 1980s led to a profound interrogation of the validity of the ethnographic method, and various scholars have since questioned its authoritative stance and its epistemology for making broad claims about other cultures (Association of Social Anthropologists, 1997; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Clifford argues that traditional ethnographies, in not discussing the ethnographic process or the positionality of the ethnographer, have presented their accounts as objective truths, while not recognising the textual nature of ethnography and the limitations of language, perception, the partial accounts of others and the limited shared subjectivity of ethnographer and informants, to accurately represent the social world of others (Clifford, 1986). In order to be transparent and signal that an ethnography is but a partial truth, he argues for reflexive writing that makes clear how claims about reality situated in interactions with others are “multi-subjective, power-laden, and incongruent” (Clifford, 1986, p. 15). What does it mean to produce an account of a digital media ecology and to take the reflexive turn seriously? In a digital media ecology situated in Grahamstown’s townships, it is important to recognise the social context of racialised inequality, the persistent racialised geography of a divided town, and the politics of language, where the language spoken by the majority is not the language of officialdom, money, power, academia or that of the researcher.

It is particularly important to unpack the power imbalances for a white middle-class female researcher engaging with predominantly unemployed black male youth, and to recognise the discourses of race, class and gender in which one is inevitably implicit. I was fortunate that my history in anti-apartheid politics, however, allowed me to question many of these discourses, and develop a specific position from which I normally see the world. During my student years, I was active in supporting township activists through my work in various national campaigns, then worked as a community trainer for activists in computer skills in the early nineties, and subsequently moved into documentary filmmaking where I focused on developmental media supporting the policies of the new democratic government, finally moving into academia. In my position as television production lecturer, I have sought out innovative ways to involve my students with storytelling around social justice and participatory forms of production with young people from the surrounding townships (Schoon, 2013). In retrospect, while I have always seen my work as supportive of a more

equitable society, I have not been aware of the extent of the “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and its effects on the sense of self-worth of black people in South Africa. Nor was I particularly conscious that post-apartheid middle-class life – which, like many other white South Africans, I considered as a still regrettably racially defined and highly unequal, yet globally “normal” middle-class modern society – is often experienced by black South Africans as an imposition of white values and an affront to their cultural values.

My work as a documentary filmmaker has, however, helped me to learn to listen to different perspectives and to tell stories through the words and stories of others. Over the past few years, through talking to a wide range of people, whether for a video documentary on a township school in Grahamstown, or in interviews with young people for my research in Hooggenoeg, or in discussions with students on issues highlighted by student protests, or in my research with hip-hop artists for this study, I have become aware that the issues of persistent inequality, human dignity and resisting assimilation into “white culture” are central concerns for many South Africans. My lack of knowledge of isiXhosa has, however, often hampered my ability to communicate. While I had tried to learn the language several times, I had never progressed beyond the basics of expression. I was lucky that many of the hip-hop artists could express themselves well in English. It is, however, important to recognise the politics of talking English, and how the language often decentres black cultural knowledge (Wa Thiong’o, 1994). I was aware that many of the hip-hop artists had therefore decided to write rap lyrics exclusively in isiXhosa only, and tried to engage with them over the basic meanings of some of the words in their tracks. Several of the hip-hop artists attempted to improve my isiXhosa vocabulary, and my struggles to learn assisted in some ways to destabilise the power relations between us.

My research site was located in my home town, Grahamstown. Through the contacts I had built up as an academic and documentary filmmaker, I had met local hip-hop artists in Grahamstown and therefore had access to a community. Historically, ethnographies in remote locations with an exotic “Other” were seen as more legitimate by anthropologists (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). The geographical distance was assumed to be a prerequisite for objectivity (Collins & Gallinat, 2013, p. 8). Increasingly, “ethnography at home” in the researcher’s own country has become more accepted as a legitimate topic of research (Collins & Gallinat, 2013, p. 8). However, I am not sure if the township areas a few kilometres from my home could really be labelled as “at home”, due to the resilient nature of apartheid divisions in my home town creating race and class divisions even in a medium-sized town of about 70 000 people. South Africa remains divided by racial residential areas and this division has become

the most resilient feature of the legacy of apartheid (Seekings, 2008). I have been fortunate through my work to have frequently engaged with township intellectuals, and I have often visited various schools and homes in the township areas of Grahamstown.

Despite my relative familiarity compared to other white residents, township experiences are marginal to my everyday life. As a white South African who grew up during apartheid, I have to acknowledge that despite my history of involvement in anti-apartheid activism and development filmmaking, I still have to actively challenge myself in terms of racial stereotyping. When I first visited hip-hop artists in the township I was, for example, very conscious of my stereotypes around criminality and young black unemployed men. Often, after spending many hours in a hip-hop artist's bedroom, I would feel embarrassed that I had been apprehensive in planning my visit, when they had been courteous and friendly and enthusiastic about the study. In some ways then, despite the fact that I was working "at home", I was also confronting the process of "othering" that is still very much part of South African society. What working in Grahamstown offered me was a way of investigating the subjectivity of people I share a town with, that would allow me to build up local relationships with other digital media producers, and so find a small way to challenge the stark divides. I would therefore never really be able to leave the field. This made it all the more important to do the research ethically and methodically, as I literally would have to live with my research for years afterwards. In working "at home", the accountability of the researcher to the participants becomes more pressing (Collins & Gallinat, 2013), especially when, as in the case of my study, the participants⁸ are likely to read it⁹.

I was conscious of the history of constructing an essentialised "other" in ethnography where culture, the world of shared meaning, is seen a homogenous and static (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), and therefore made an effort to collect data about the different beliefs and interests of hip-hop artists to convey the diversity of this social world. Despite the fact that I have quoted extensively from participants in this study, the text remains my construction, and therefore this ethnography will remain, like other single author ethnographies, only a "partial truth" (Clifford, 1986). As this study involved elements of visual ethnography, reflexivity should also extend to questioning the photographic approach of the ethnographer, and the ethnographer should reflect on her relationship with her photographic subjects and the

⁸ Following Fetterman (1989), I have avoided using the somewhat sinister term "key informants" and instead, as is common in qualitative research, I use the term "participants" to emphasise the important contribution the hip-hop artists have made in participating in the research project.

⁹ A few of the hip-hop artists are following me on Academia.edu

theories that inform her approach to photography (Pink, 2013, p. 76). As a documentary filmmaker partial to verité methods (see Rabiger, 2009), I tried to approach my photography in this manner, capturing events without much intervention in setting up shots, or rearranging scenes for optimal lighting. In capturing video and images, following Pink (2013), I resisted conceptualising the resulting media as an adequate representation of the hip-hop artists' digital practices, and instead used these as a basis for eliciting their own interpretations of the events I had filmed, so embracing a dialogical approach to ethnography where the participants are frequently engaged in interpretation of their own practices (Tedlock, 1987). This dialogical approach was central to the study, and contributed to various stages of the research.

2.2 First steps of the research journey

I entered the field with the help of a senior well-respected leader in the hip-hop community of Grahamstown, XNasty, who was also the founder of the cultural development organisation Fingo Festival, previously known as the Fingo Revolutionaries. He was slight in build with a peppercorn beard and a disarming smile and normally wore a beanie and Timbaland boots. He was at once philosophical, charming and somewhat didactic, always trying to educate others on the hip-hop movement and his newly-found vegetarian lifestyle. His knowledge of Grahamstown history, music, black consciousness and politics in general was extensive. XNasty was now in his thirties; as a teen in the mid-nineties he had started the Def Boyz, Grahamstown's first hip-hop crew. His status in the hip-hop scene probably resulted in me benefiting from his introduction, a phenomenon known as the "halo effect" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 44). With XNasty's assistance, I set up a hip-hop workshop at the Fingo Village library, where I started to get to know members of the hip-hop community, who in turn introduced me to more artists, thus resulting in a form of snowball sampling. While qualitative researchers do not choose participants in the statistical manner of quantitative sampling, one needs to make decisions about what segment of a community to focus on, taking into account from which group one would most probably get the most relevant data (Fetterman, 1989). I was interested in technological ingenuity among marginalised people and wanted to engage with the literature of digital media in low-income areas of the developing world (Burrell, 2012; Horst & Miller, 2006; Liu, Boden, Randall, & Wulf, 2014; Miller & Slater, 2000; Qiu, 2009). I therefore did not attempt to identify a sample representative of the entire hip-hop community of Grahamstown. For example, I did not seek out hip-hop artists among the

students at Rhodes University or at the various private and suburban schools in town. Instead, I focused on hip-hop artists who lived in the black low-income township areas of Grahamstown.

I did not constrain myself to this criterion, however. This was because several of the artists who originated in the Grahamstown township hip-hop scene had in the past few years relocated to Grahamstown suburbs. They were still very much part of the township hip-hop social world and some played active leadership roles there, particularly the hip-hop leader XNasty. At the same time, these town-based artists were trying to become involved in the suburban and student cultural worlds and often tried to imagine ways to eradicate the divisions in Grahamstown's social worlds which were a legacy of old apartheid-era divisions. Over the course of the research, this proved to be a valuable sampling decision, as themes of social mobility and belonging developed in the research, and these participants added rich additional insights into this aspect of the ethnography. There were very few female hip-hop artists that I encountered in Grahamstown. However, I decided that despite their proportional marginality in the hip-hop scene, I would spend time with and interview as many as I could. I was particularly interested in how gender is mobilised in hip-hop identities and the role it plays in hip-hop culture in Grahamstown. I did not, however, equate gender solely with the feminine, but also explored issues of masculinity with male hip-hop artists. The insights and comments provided by the two female hip-hop artists, however, provided useful perspectives through which to understand gender in Grahamstown's hip-hop culture.

The challenge of doing digital ethnography lies in defining the field as a mixture of offline-online spaces (Burrell, 2012). Ethnography has long moved away from conceptualising the field as a bounded territory with a unique local culture isolated from the outside world (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Instead, the notion of "multi-sited ethnography" has emerged in which cultural meanings, objects and identities may circulate in fragmented spaces (Marcus, 1998, pp. 79–80). My field site was the spaces of media production and performance in Grahamstown, but I was also in contact via Facebook and WhatsApp interactions with many of the artists, so that these online spaces became part of my field site. These interactions were, however, not systematic, and I did not, for example, make a detailed study of people's Facebook pages, so that this study lacks the systematic attention virtual ethnography gives online text (Hine, 2000). Instead, I visited profile pages after spending time with hip-hop artists or simply became aware of Facebook postings through the Facebook timeline, leading to occasional visits to profile pages. My observations were therefore often random, but also algorithmic (Bucher, 2012; Sun, Rosenn, Marlow, & Lento, 2009), as those

artists I interacted with more through Facebook messenger had their posts more frequently displayed in my feed.

Despite the lack of a systematic study, my exposure to their social media often helped make sense of what was happening in people's personal lives. Through Facebook posts in particular, I became aware of financial difficulties, personal tragedies and travels to remote family. My research was, however, only multi-sited in that I combined the study of offline and online spaces¹⁰. I did not, for example, follow artists to other towns when they held performances there, or visit the African Hebrew hip-hop community in Port Elizabeth who had close links with some hip-hop artists in Grahamstown. While recognising the critiques of focusing on the local in a globalised and connected world (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), I wanted to foreground the cultural world in one specific space that I knew well in order to be able to contextualise it better. I was keen to emphasise the diversity of ideas and cultural practices that exist in the township areas of one town despite the structural deprivations of these spaces in post-apartheid South Africa. In the multi-sited field, the various spaces are analytically cohered by the ethnographer, who establishes "links and commonalities, often through extended metaphor" (Marcus, 1998, p. 90). Marcus (1998, pp. 90–95) argues that the researcher should define the field of research not on the basis of a geographic space, but instead through following a process, and observing its stages. In defining the field of hip-hop in Grahamstown, I not only tried to follow the process of music production and distribution, but also focused on the process of becoming a hip-hop artist in this space. The spaces that defined music production also defined membership of the community, such as the cyphers, the backyard studios, hip-hop workshops and local Facebook hip-hop profiles. This conception of the field enabled me to observe and understand hip-hop as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

My PhD studies were sponsored by the Finnish mobile phone company Nokia, and the initial idea for the study was that my research would contribute to the design of new mobile applications for young people in developing countries. My research project was based at the ICT4D lab at the University of Cape Town, with an interdisciplinary research team

¹⁰ I have considered that making explicit distinctions between online and offline spaces may be considered a form of "digital dualism" (Jurgenson, 2012) as digital platforms have become increasingly part of everyday life through mobile platforms. However, here I am not referring to the integrated everyday life experience of a research subject using digital technology, but instead to the researcher's construction of a multi-pronged strategy involving the explicit selection of various physical spaces and online spaces to observe in order to construct a field where the most pertinent data may be gathered.

which included many computer science post-graduate students. I was keen to channel my documentary filmmaking skills – which also included experience in observation and in-depth interviewing – into creating a detailed description of the world of township hip-hop artists and their digital media practices. I knew that these young hip-hop artists were very ingenious in using their mobile phones, but that they faced many difficulties in affording relatively sophisticated applications, as these were priced out of their range. I hoped that through my interactions with these hip-hop artists I would be able to gather knowledge that would be useful for a fellow researcher based in computer science, to design such mobile applications. At the start of the study, I was more focused on gathering such design-orientated data. I therefore set up various skills workshops to get a better understanding of the types of skills hip-hop artists wanted to be able to master. Such skills workshops are common in action research, a method that has been used in a range of Australian studies to research how people interact meaningfully with digital technology (Hearn & Foth, 2005; Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003). Action research follows a participant-focused approach and empowers participants to determine the agenda for the learning process, while allowing the researcher insight into the process of adoption (Tacchi et al., 2003). A computer science Master's student was allocated to work with me and my participatory methods of action research complemented the participatory design approach she used to develop a mobile music mixing application (Harrilal, Schoon, & Blake, 2016).

I conceptualised a methodology which would use a mixture of ethnography and action research. Initially, I expected the workshop action research data to form the bulk of my research. The action research process, however, proved more difficult than expected. Firstly, I had initially conceptualised the Grahamstown hip-hop community to be organised into a single structure with shared goals and projects, and who could easily translate such goals into digital media strategies. However, while artists shared a strong sense of identity, values and a local history, the hip-hop scene in Grahamstown better resembled a rhizomatic network (Deleuze, 1987) of many different crews, small companies and production studios, all with different goals and priorities (see Haupt, 2008 for a more detailed analysis of how hip-hop rhizomic networks oppose capital's rhizomic power). There was therefore no single organisation that could be consulted to create a workshop agenda that realistically represented all local hip-hop artists. I helped organise five digital skills training workshops for the hip-hop artists, which allowed me to get a comparative picture of their skill levels, and to spend time observing them acquire new skills. In the workshops participation was limited, indeed many artists were adamant that they wanted to listen to experts from outside during a

workshop event, and that discussing their own understandings and sharing skills was not a productive use of their time. Furthermore, my isiXhosa language proficiency was very basic, and as many of the participants in the workshops spoke only isiXhosa with very little English, this further complicated my research process. The Fingo Festival, as hosts of the workshop, had also recently established close ties with a hip-hop group from Port Elizabeth who had superior technical skills and very particular ideas about hip-hop and spirituality. This meant that they would often take charge of the discussions, creating less opportunity for gathering data from Grahamstown artists. I did, however, not want to impose an “action research” way of running a workshop onto the Fingo Festival or Grahamstown artists in general, as I did not see it fit to set the agenda as an outsider when I had specifically told them that they would determine the contents of such workshops.

I declared my affiliation to Nokia to the hip-hop artists, who, contrary to my expectations, were not concerned about how this research would be used by Nokia, but excited to be associated with a brand they respected. They willingly contributed many ideas for possible mobile applications. At the first workshop I hosted, I asked all participants to fill in a two-page questionnaire with information on their ownership of digital devices as well as the mobile applications they used. I distributed the questionnaire to 29 participants, most of whom were hip-hop artists¹¹. I surveyed an additional 15 hip-hop artists in a subsequent workshop in February 2014, using the same questionnaire. The results of this initial questionnaire guided the focus study, as it revealed that township-based hip-hop artists did not only use mobile phones, as I had assumed, but that many also used computers. Questionnaires are often used for exploratory data gathering, and the key to their validity is to ensure that respondents are able to understand the questions and that questions address issues that the respondents can actually answer (Babbie et al., 2002, pp. 232–236). While my questionnaire was written in English, I did not try to elicit any complicated opinions, but focused on very basic concrete questions about the types of digital technology, airtime and applications the respondents were using.

A range of useful insights were developed through these workshops, particularly related to the meanings of various forms of technology and how they were integrated into social practices. This data was, however, somewhat patchy in how it addressed the research question, as various presentations by outside speakers requested by the hip-hop artists

¹¹ A few house music deejays also attended the workshops.

focused on best practice under well-resourced technical conditions instead of the actual precarious technical circumstances of most hip-hop artists. Once I realised that these hip-hop artists were not only making use of mobile phones, but using them in various innovative ways with DVD players and computers, I became more interested in documenting these innovative uses of mobile technology in combination with other technologies, and the motivations and meanings that helped them make sense of these, than trying to design a new product. Despite the fact that Nokia's mobile phone business disintegrated during the course of the study due to the company selling up to Microsoft, I still managed to assist the MSc student in computer science to develop various mobile music-making applications (Harrilal et al., 2016). While this study is an ethnographic study, it thus still had a small impact in terms of actual design of mobile applications. I am also hoping that many mobile designers, policy makers and development activists will read the thesis and find it useful for their own work.

As Nokia's involvement in the interdisciplinary research project waned, the demands on my research project in designing mobile applications became less onerous, and I could focus on the ethnographic research, which produced much richer data. This kind of adaptation of method is not an unusual decision (McGuigan, 1997, p. 2). As ethnography relies on the ethnographer as instrument, it is up to him or her to come up with specific strategies in the field that have been adapted to the specific situations of the research subjects and their perceptions of the world and expectations of the researcher (Josephides, 1997, p. 32). The ethnographic data addressed the research questions more directly and provided a more holistic picture of the media ecologies. Through the skills workshops, I could identify young people who were articulate in English and who seemed particularly adept at using technology. I still continued with the action research workshops, but for the purpose of supplementary data gathering and as a reciprocal contribution to the hip-hop community that was supporting my research.

2.3 “Hanging out” and dialogical interpretation

I felt privileged that I could interact with marginalised young people and their technology “in the field”. Many digital media researchers have had to rely solely on training projects where they introduced marginalised young people to digital media for the first time (Block & Buckingham, 2007; Burgess, 2006; Hartley & McWilliam, 2009; Lambert, 2013). Such studies arguably do not reflect the kind of digital practices young people might have developed on their own. I was particularly fortunate that I had found an existing group of

highly competent digital media producers, who had organically developed their own digital media practices, and this made it possible to observe their very particular digital practices in the field.

In creating an ethnographic description of the hip-hop artists' digital media ecologies, I combined extended periods of observation alongside discussions with hip-hop artists about their practices, in this way incorporating the hip-hop artists' own interpretation of their social environment and their digital practices within my analysis, so engaging in a dialogical ethnography (Tedlock, 1987). My own observations allowed me to contextualise the hip-hop artists' comments for my readers. Murphy (2011, p. 397) urges media studies scholars conducting ethnography to make sure their ethnographies involve gathering experiential knowledge, lest they remain superficial. Without rigorous descriptions of the field that reveal power imbalances and cultural context, media studies "ethnographies" based solely on interviews have often compromised validity by co-opting the interviewee's de-contextualised statements as argument (Nightingale, 1993, p. 168). Englund (2006, pp. 145–167) shows how anthropologists have used such contextualising observations to reinterpret interviews and arrive at very different interpretations from those derived from decontextualised interviews. Experiencing events over time, the ethnographer can turn a fleeting observation into an "inscription" where practices and their meanings are interpreted in context and fixed in writing (Geertz, 1973, p. 19). This is why I chose to spend extensive periods in the field observing hip-hop artists working with digital technology, particularly as digital practices may involve tacit everyday knowledge which is not often expressed in an interview. Ethnography means "writing people" and that is why it is generally descriptive (Melhuus, Mitchell, & Wulff, 2010, p. 2). Participant observation is the most common method used and describes a type of observation where the ethnographer is simultaneously a member of the group she or he is studying, while also being a researcher observing everyone in the group (Babbie et al., 2002, p. 293). My participation in making a music video with a hip-hop crew, not only allowed me to be part of their creative process, but was also a form of "giving back" (Swartz, 2011) and thanking the hip-hop artists for all the assistance they had offered me. Participant observation allows data collection to be driven by the actual concerns of the participants, in my case call-outs for technical computer assistance provided valuable data. Geertz (citing Gilbert Ryle, 1973, pp. 6–7) argues for spending long periods in the field in order to develop a "thick description", or interpretations steeped in understandings of contextual meaning. To illustrate the value of such thick description, he shows how it allows the ethnographer to distinguish various meanings of the blink of an eye in a specific context:

it could be a wink that signifies a secret between two boys, but the same movement exaggerated by another boy in their presence can give it another meaning entirely: a parody mocking the lack of winking prowess of the first boy. Thick description demands that the ethnographer not only understand the ranges of different contextual meanings, but also various levels of meaning, such as the meaning of teasing in a culture. In contrast, “thin descriptions” would only describe in detail the movement of eyes blinking without linking the interpretation to an understanding of this cultural world (Geertz, 1973, p. 12). Participant observation was key to understand the lack of material resources available to many of the hip-hop artists, and so make sense of their skills in tinkering and repair. This was information I would not have gleaned from interviews alone.

In ethnographic research, the researcher plays a particular role as research instrument, where a distinction is made between the outsider or “etic” perspective, and the “emic” or insider perspective, both of which are essential for ethnographic research (Fetterman, 1989). Habits and attitudes are clearer to outsiders who do not yet experience their adopted world as common sense and who can then use the distance of this “etic” perspective to start making theoretical sense of any seemingly strange behaviours in field notes (Fetterman, 1989, p. 27). At the beginning of my study, the hip-hop artists spoke with great excitement about the studios where they recorded, and I was greatly surprised to discover these studios were very humble backyard bedrooms generally made of mud and corrugated iron. Reflecting on this helped provide insights into the symbolic importance of a computer and microphone to transform the space. In fieldwork, another perspective becomes possible as researchers become habituated to the social world. They start to share the perspective of their participants in the field, developing an “emic” perspective, where they come to understand why people do what they do (Fetterman, 1989, p. 31). The process of participation is a constant process of education, as the researcher through social sanction or disapproval, acquires “social learning” about correct behaviour in the field (Melhuus et al., 2010, p. 6). I discovered very quickly, for example, that any jokes about alcohol were taboo as these were seen as negative and destructive by most of the hip-hop artists in my study.

However, relying entirely on the ethnographer’s powers of interpretation are problematic. Geertz’s critics have slated how this method has often essentialised research participants, portraying them not as individuals with agency, but always typical of a group (e.g. “The Balinese”), because they were not allowed the opportunity to interpret their own culture and generally have no voice in the ethnographic text (Clifford, 1986; Crapazano, 1986). Clifford (1986) shows that by mainly relying on his own interpretations, Geertz has

often attributed his own subjectivity to the people he was observing. Owusu (1978, p. 312) argues that the validity of African ethnographies, in particular, have often been compromised due to an over-reliance on theoretical work from elsewhere. Actual evidence available in the field has frequently been disregarded, while the writing flair of the ethnographer has often been valued more than ethnographic evidence (Owusu, 1978). A new generation of ethnographers have called for the inclusion of multiple voices in making cultural interpretations, as well as a critical examination of the ethnographer's own position within the field as the source of such interpretations (Clifford, 1983, 1986; Crapazano, 1986; Davies, 1999). Such a dialogical approach does not merely refer to including comments from participants to illustrate the ethnographer's interpretation, but specifically to incorporate the participants' analysis of their social environment into the ethnography (Tedlock, 1987).

I was fortunate in that the hip-hop artists were adept in interpreting their social world, as hip-hop in Grahamstown as "conscious hip-hop" had a tradition of contemplating the social environment and critiquing it in rap tracks. As their digital practices were situated in social spaces of collective learning and working, hip-hop artists were used to discussing their digital workflows. This meant that they were very capable in interpreting their social environment and their own digital practices. At various points during my observations I would bring out my video camera to record interviews, and I interviewed 17 young men and two young women for periods that ranged from 40 minutes to three and a half hours. Several of the artists were interviewed more than once. I devised semi-structured interviews (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999, p. 65) in which I set out to talk to young people about how they became involved with hip-hop, and how they used technologies such as mobile phones and personal computers, and what meanings these practices had in their lives. I was particularly interested in the narrative of moments of adoption, as they encapsulated particular moments of agency in which the young person chose a new course of action. In order to promote a dialogic approach in which I could draw on the interpretations of the participants, I specifically created opportunities for unstructured interviewing in which I asked the artists to offer their interpretation of the issues that came up in a conversation directly before the interview, or in an event I had witnessed in the field. During the interviews, I would often ask the hip-hop artists to explain particular media or practices from their digital media ecology to me, such as explaining the words of a song, or demonstrating the very particular ways they used software on their computers. Such elicitation techniques are often used by ethnographers (Fetterman, 1989, p. 66). Elicitation techniques were also used in my collaboration with the computer science student, where we provided hip-hop

artists with illustrations of digital media components, so they could use these to explain their workflow to us (Harrilal et al., 2016).

While several of the hip-hop artists were interviewed individually, those who performed as a group often felt more comfortable being interviewed together. These group interviews, with two, three, five or, in one case, eighteen young people, could therefore be considered focus groups. The group dynamics provided some indicator of reliability, as I could compare the data gathered in individual interviews, where artists were interacting only with me, with the data I gathered in such focus groups. As Lundt and Livingstone (1996, p. 93) argue, focus groups allow members of the group to challenge each other, and to ask for a person to demand evidence for their claims, thus providing reliability checks for the data. Both the individual interviews and these focus groups were conducted in English. African ethnographies have often suffered from mistranslation due to the cultural and language gaps between participants and ethnographers (Owusu, 1978, p. 312). However, the hip-hop artists, as poets, had a flair for language and many had become fluent in English through their love for hip-hop. In the Grahamstown community many hip-hop artists had actively developed their English language skills through consulting dictionaries and reading English books as part of a process of becoming a “mastermind”. It may therefore be possible that these participants are quite unusual in their relatively sophisticated English language skills compared to other township youth whose school education is often not of a high enough standard to develop such fluency. In those few cases where artists struggled to express abstract, metaphorical concepts in English, I relied on the help of key participants to assist with translations. The translators were always part of the hip-hop community and friends with the interviewee, which minimised the risk of imposing different interpretations on this shared hip-hop culture that a translator from outside the field may have posed (Temple & Young, 2004). While I recognised “psychological gaps” (Owusu, 1978) between myself and the participants due to our vastly different life experiences, I was always aware of our similarities as media producers, technophiles and creatives. This made me constantly subject to thoughts of “there, but for the grace of God, go I” and to interrogate the unfairness of their material conditions and lack of opportunities

2.4 Observing people through technology: the camera and social media

In order to build relationships, I filmed most of my interviews with hip-hop artists, as I found that I fitted in better holding a video camera because my cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986b) as

media producer gave me some status in the field of hip-hop. I made seven music videos with local crews, which allowed for intense conversations about the meanings of hip-hop lyrics and the images that reflected the crew's style. Collier and Collier's (1986) claim that the camera can serve as a "can opener" truly resonated with my experience. My video camera prompted great interest among the participants, who were always eager to assist in film production and keen to learn more about the process. Often the use of the video camera was more important to establish rapport than it was for documentation. Afterwards, artists were often interested in having a digital copy of the interview or music video, which allowed me to visit them at their homes again and to observe their skills at file management and distribution. My digital skills also allowed me to offer assistance in configuring software and hardware and to recommend and help install new software. Several producers made use of my offer to download copies of useful freeware such as anti-virus software, trial versions of media software and file converters, which I then took to their rooms and helped them install. In this way I was able to actively participate in the field and, instead of simply observing the artists, to engage in a key method of ethnography: participatory observation. I was therefore able to find ways to "hang out" with these young people despite our differences.

There is a danger, however, that the camera may arguably create distance between a researcher and participants as she disengages from the field and relies on analysis of hours and hours of video clips outside of the field. Markham (2013) critiques the practices of digital ethnographers who gather a large amount of data to be analysed at a later stage, instead of engaging directly in the field through participant observation, and allowing that experience to guide interpretation. In fieldwork, the context should drive research questions and methodological practice (Melhuus et al., 2010). This means that the ethnographer should focus on staying present in the field, constantly and organically devising methods and questions that address the concerns that have emerged at particular moments in time. I always engaged with the hip-hop artists while filming, asking them to explain what was happening, or to comment on the actions of others.

As I was often filming, I was generally not able to take field notes while in the field, but tended to do this afterwards. Instead, I used the video camera and camera phone as a way of taking field notes, either by asking questions that emerged through observation as described above, or by explicitly focusing on the things I found specifically significant in close ups. For example, noticing the elaborate patterns of electric wiring in one of the studios, I followed the wires with my camera in close up across the roof. As the labour involved in

filming was quite intensive – it included preparing equipment for the field, digitising tapes,¹² importing footage into editing software, exporting these into compressed formats, creating DVDs for participants, as well as the intense focus over several days of editing music videos in collaboration with participants – this meant that it was often difficult to write elaborate field notes. I would generally find time, however, to jot down keywords from comments made in conversation and short notes on my own reactions, while at other times I was able to describe my observations in much more detail. While video could capture detailed observational data, I missed making extensive reflexive notes on my own reactions. While such self-reflective comments are absent from classic anthropological texts such as Geertz's work, critiques of these have shown how such a lack of self-awareness incorrectly constructs the ethnographer as a disembodied, objective, invisible person (Crapazano, 1986). Rewatching the footage while writing the thesis, I was able to contemplate my reactions, and write some notes based on memory of my own reactions. However, I relied more on my interactions in the field in the analysis. Following Tedlock (1987), I thus prioritised the dialogical aspect of working in the field and incorporating the interpretations of others above delving extensively into my own feelings and reactions.

Engaging in reflexive practice was particularly useful to understand how the hip-hop artists saw me as a researcher. In trying to make sense of one of the hip-hop artist's refusal to outline what visual effect he wanted for his video, but demanding that I surprise him with something "professional", I came to understand this as a challenge. Even though I was not a rapper, I had to some extent become part of a competitive culture of hip-hop practice where I needed to earn my right to be part of the group through participation. Another important reflexive realisation was realising how the hip-hop artists conceptualised my filming of their activities as part of their aspirations to gaining access to celebrity and the media. On several occasions they would shift the focus of their engagement away from their practices, e.g. working on the computer, and performing for the camera as an imagined media audience. With the passing of time, as they habituated themselves to my filming, such performances became less frequent, and I could capture scenes which were arguably closer to how they would have approached their activities had I not been present. As the study progressed, hip-hop artists started approaching me for help with their everyday problems, such as dealing

¹² I chose to use an older video recorder with good lenses and sound quality and that did not use MP4 compression so that it had smooth capturing of motion. Thus I could produce a reasonably good quality film to publicise my research and promote the hip-hop artists of Grahamstown.

with illness in the family, or applying for study programmes, which alerted me to the hardships they encountered in their lives, and so provided very different data than the sentiments expressed with bravado in front of the camera at the start of the study.

The dialogical interactions were not just present in interviews, but extended to the actual process of filming where I used a collaborative filming approach engaging hip-hop artists in the planning of music videos. These discussions revealed complex relationships with the neighbourhood, experienced as a space of belonging as well as a space they disassociated from due to experiences of violence. Collaborative filmmaking can be an important tool in learning about cultures of visual representation (Pink, 2013, p. 87). I was able to see the participants' visual representations of themselves and their world on their devices and social media. This also provided more information about how people wanted to be represented. I did not, however, treat photographs as realist documents, recognising that the meanings of photographs are "contingent and subjective; they depend on who is looking, and when they are looking" (Pink, 2013, p. 75). I therefore used photographic images as ways to engage artists, for example, helping artists grab still images from their music videos looking for the perfect pose, while discussing which visual moments were "wack" (inappropriate) or "dope" (great).

In my interactions with them, the hip-hop artists presented themselves as deeply moral people who generally eschewed alcohol, and focused on positive improvement of their communities, education and traditional values. As most were young men in their twenties, I assumed they would embrace a certain degree of rebellious hedonism and anarchy from my experience with young middle-class male students. I was concerned that my presence as a white middle-class woman might have resulted in them tempering their more explicit political messages and expressions of rage and rebellion, instead constructing themselves as "good boys" purely for my benefit. However, in observing their Facebook posts, and reading the translated lyrics of their songs, I realised that this moral identity was indeed the identity they presented consistently in all their media and social interactions. These Facebook posts and song lyrics therefore provided a form of triangulation (Babbie et al., 2002) for the findings. Spending time with the hip-hop artists allowed me to realise that such moral behaviour should not be misinterpreted as acquiescence with authority, but was in itself a rebellion – a refusal to take up a social position which refused them dignity and worth.

Social media postings were thus part of the participant observation process. When I encountered hip-hop artists' social media posts, I tried to understand these in terms of my understandings of Grahamstown hip-hop culture. I therefore used the insights gathered

through observations in face-to-face interactions to make sense of online postings. Many of the social media posts I observed, for example, related to the tensions between hoping for a successful future and avoiding social jealousy, which hip-hop artists had spoken about passionately in their interviews. In documenting my observations of social media, I did not rely on video, instead I copied selections from the computer screen and made occasional fieldnotes. These social media posts therefore provided insights that supplemented the primary observations in the field, as did the lyrics from several of the hip-hop tracks.

I was able to use some research funds to pay one of the hip-hop artists, IThala Lenyani, to translate nearly thirty of the isiXhosa hip-hop songs I had collected in the course of the study. In discussing each translation with him, I relied on his interpretations to make detailed cultural notes on the significance of various objects mentioned in the lyrics. Due to his understanding of the local hip-hop culture, he was able to point out when particular lyrics were referring to particular hip-hop histories, such as the release of a CD, and point out that some lyrics should be interpreted as making sense in terms of their rhythmic quality in constructing a good “flow”. Through the dialogical method, I was able to draw on the interpretations of the translator as well as the authors of various tracks. When I worked with hip-hop crews in producing a music video, I asked them to provide a copy of the lyrics and to discuss the meanings of the lyrics with me in detail so we could plan the images for the video. In reading these translated hip-hop lyrics, I did not conduct a detailed textual analysis such as a discourse analysis (Babbie et al., 2002), but instead conducted a more informal “close reading” (Babbie et al., 2002) where I searched for similar themes to the ones that had emerged in observations and interviews. Thus hip-hop lyrics were primarily used as a type of triangulation, as indicated above. They also provided valuable additional data on textual features such as the extent of references to traditional Xhosa culture in the isiXhosa tracks. IsiXhosa lyrics cited in the study were checked by a professional translator. I was able to translate many of the Afrikaans tracks myself, although I had to check certain words with hip-hop artists, due to the particular local dialect. What was notable here was the integration of different languages, English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa, in several of the tracks.

2.5 Data analysis

It is difficult to separate the process of interpretation in the field with the analysis eventually documented in the ethnography. In the field, as I followed a dialogical method, the interpretations of the hip-hop artists were integrated with my own interpretations. Writing up

the final analysis thus has the quality of a remix (Navas, Gallagher, & burrough, 2014), as I combined my ideas with those of the hip-hop artists and the academic literature to “remix” them into a new work. The remix as a concept is not simply considered a replication and assembly of the ideas of others, but is a creative act. Through deliberate juxtapositioning and synthesis something new emerges. As Irvine (2014, p. 21) notes:

...meaning emerges through a “Remix” of symbolically structured “inputs” restructured into further “outputs” with a “value-add”, a development of additional conceptual relations and contexts for other routes in a meaning network.

In this ethnography, I have remixed my own interpretation with those of the hip-hop artists along with insights from the academic literature. I have responded to Owusu’s (1978) caution not to be blinded to the evidence in the field by theories developed elsewhere, by resisting the imposition of theoretical frameworks until I had spent several months in the field. Instead, I allowed events and the hip-hop artists’ interpretations to guide my theoretical reading. For example, the hip-hop artists’ interpretations based on Biko’s (1978) ideas on black consciousness led me to explore his writing, as well as others that had in turn inspired him, such as Fanon (1965; 2008/1952). This impulse to suspend my theoretical reading meant that in data analysis I followed a “grounded theory” approach (Glaser, 1978), where fieldnotes and transcribed interviews were imported into the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo, and each document was read in its entirety and coded according to themes that emerged from the text.

It is important to note that a software programme does not perform an analysis of the data on its own, but that the researcher’s role is still central in coding and analysing the data (Bazeley, 2007, p. 7). However, the affordances of the software allowed for much more extensive coding and classification than a researcher with a manual coding system could ever dream of, enabling me to create more than a hundred codes for various hip-hop practices, technologies and social phenomena. De Wet and Erasmus (2005) recommend that verification in the data analysis is important to ensure rigour, and the affordances of NVivo facilitated such checking of coding. Each particular code’s data was viewed simultaneously, combining extracts from several transcriptions and fieldnotes all coded under the same theme. The data for similar codes, e.g. “jealousy” and “snobbery”, were viewed consecutively so as to allow for the merging of codes where necessary, or the reclassification of particular elements of data classified incorrectly. I particularly struggled to come up with

codes for social phenomena, and here consulting literature on “ghetto” environments (e.g. MacLeod, 2009; Venkatesh, 2002; Wacquant, 1998a) helped me create codes such as nihilistic behaviour, social judgement, social value and aspiration.

Then I grouped the various codes together, creating code hierarchies. I constructed three data trees: social context, hip-hop practices, and issues of infrastructure and digital materiality. This broad classification was based on my definition of digital media ecologies, inspired by the literature (Horst et al., 2010; Lievrouw, 2014; Magaudda, 2011) which had formed the basis of my ethnographic enquiry. Each data tree had three or four levels of hierarchy in which to group the codes, for example hip-hop practices was divided into writing, performing, recording, etc., while performing included subcategories such as rehearsing, rapping, dancing, organising a performance, etc. These data trees were then developed into the ethnography, where I used hip-hop practices as a guiding narrative thread, and then highlighted how digital objects and infrastructure and social phenomena were embedded within such practices. In writing the ethnography, I was particularly aware of the constructed nature of ethnographic representation (Clifford, 1983). As a media practitioner I was mindful of the distorting effects of news values in selecting and highlighting sensational negative events over ordinary social processes (O’Neill & Harcup, 2009) and took care to moderate my journalistic impulses and not only highlight social problems, but also noting more positive aspects and mundane aspects of everyday life. I tried to juxtapose thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the material and social dilemmas these young people confront with the richness of their cultural world, which was often revealed in observations and interviews.

In writing up the analysis, I tried to foreground the interpretations of the hip-hop artists by often quoting them extensively, especially in the initial chapters on the social context of the township. It was not always possible to include verbatim quotes due to constraints of space, which meant that I often needed to summarise their insights. Here I tried to always attribute their comments in such summaries. In the later chapters on their digital media practices their comments were more factual than interpretive, which meant that I did not quote artists as extensively. In order to mitigate this and foreground the agency of hip-hop artists in creating various innovative technical solutions, I created a short documentary in which their voices dominate and serve as commentary, and here my structuring commentary was limited to brief intertitles (Schoon, 2016).

While it is a common practice to grant anonymity to research subjects, in research which focuses on the contribution people have made to society, not acknowledging such

contributions may be ethically problematic, as researchers in oral history (Janovicek, 2007; Ní Laoire, 2007) and education (Shulman, 1990) have pointed out. I wanted to acknowledge the important contribution the hip-hop artists had made to this ethnography in contributing their analysis of the field. Furthermore, their authorial right to lay claim to their art works as quoted in this thesis, and their pride in being part of the hip-hop culture meant that they insisted on not being anonymised. Therefore, I follow Haupt (2008; 2012), Pritchard (2011) and Becker and Dastile (2008) in using hip-hop names in the thesis. I was at one point concerned that some participants had discussed various illegal media-sharing practices, which although common practice among South Africans (Primo & Lloyd, 2011) did potentially involve criminal piracy charges. When I presented them with the option of anonymising themselves in the study, using alternative hip-hop names, the hip-hop artists were appalled. They wanted people to know what they were doing, and their important role in discouraging youth from criminality and alcoholism in their community, so hiding their identities made it appear that they had something to be ashamed of, they said.

The hip-hop artists had a sense of themselves as exceptional people, and expressed a deep need for their artistic and moral choices to be recognised. I realised that being named was part of a process of recognition that they expected in order to feel validated. All of the hip-hop artists therefore completed consent forms listing their hip-hop names as the names they would be identified by in the thesis. While they would be recognised by fans and friends through these hip-hop names, this did not necessarily mean they would be recognised by those in authority. However, this was still possible. I resolved to describe issues of illegal activity such as media sharing in generic terms, not naming individual artists in these descriptions. I therefore managed to provide acknowledgement without sacrificing confidentiality of sensitive information, emphasising the importance of not conflating anonymity and confidentiality (Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011). This naming practice would enable me to acknowledge their contribution to the research and allow the hip-hop artists the right to lay claim to their stories, while also hopefully protecting them from harm. Many of the hip-hop artists saw their participation in the research project as a way of sharing positive stories of township spaces and contributing to the writing up of the history of Grahamstown hip-hop. Hip-hop is a practice where representing neighbourhood and place is particularly important (Forman, 2004a), and such acknowledgement of place can be understood as challenging the stigmatisation of “ghetto” neighbourhoods (Wacquant, 2007). For this reason I also did not anonymise Grahamstown as a place in the research.

For me the greatest ethical dilemma presented in the research was my responsibility as a person of relative privilege in the face of thoughtful, talented and idealistic young people with very few chances in life. This responsibility is amplified with the knowledge that millions of young people across South Africa are similarly stuck outside of any opportunities (Cloete, 2009). In a highly unequal society, research ethics should consider how research may function as some sort of intervention in the lives of research participants (Swartz, 2011). I attempted to assist my participants as much as I could, not only by helping them with music videos, but also assisting them with study and job applications. In many cases this proved even more disturbing, as they often could not qualify for anything, either because they did not have adequate school marks, or because they had simply missed a deadline by a few days. I therefore see this thesis and subsequent publications arising from the research as bearing a particular responsibility to give voice to the plight of these young people. As is common throughout the world, young people in South Africa are often seen as a problem to be addressed or a project to be tackled:

...young people tend to be depicted from two angles that leave little scope for agency: from a welfare angle, which views them as dependent and immature, thus in need of “improvement” and from a problem-orientated angle, which characterises them as troublesome and therefore prone to problematic behaviour that needs controlling and curtailing (Weiss 2004, cited in Hansen & Dalsgaard, 2008, p. 10).

In South Africa, youth face the added burden of constantly being found lacking in terms of the heroic legacy of anti-apartheid leadership provided by young people in the past (Mattes, 2012). Instead, they are often spoken of as statistics or as “ticking time bombs” (Merrington, 2014), thus not offering them the opportunity of agency and of speaking up for themselves. The tendency to marginalise the voices of young people and to deny them agency is common across the globe and in reaction to this, critical youth studies (Best, 2007) emphasise agency and voice for young people. While many of the young people in this study were in their late twenties and would not be considered youth in a developed country, many recognise that due to various forces associated with globalisation and the internationalisation of markets, young people in developing countries often remain marginalised and outside the world of adult responsibility for much longer (Blossfield & Burgess, 2005). In the Global South, many young people remain dependent during their twenties and early thirties, subject to hierarchical and authoritarian gender- and generation-based relationships with parents, guardians and larger society (Hansen & Dalsgaard, 2008, p. 8). I have thus extended my

relationship with these young people beyond the fieldwork period, and have continued to assist them with various ventures throughout the writing-up of the thesis. Through the fieldwork, I have become one of the few sources of middle-class social capital they have access to, and envision the relationship I have crafted with them to extend well into the future, as I remain a part of this town. This therefore returns this chapter to the relationships of power explored at its beginning.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained how I came to adopt a dialogical approach to digital ethnography, in which I integrated the interpretations of the hip-hop artists into my analysis of the digital media ecology. This decision emerged out of acknowledging relationships of power and my positioning in this project vis-à-vis the hip-hop artists. Using a dialogical approach allowed me to engage with issues of validity and ethics in a social context where I as the ethnographer was separated from my participants by a vast gulf of social inequalities. Thanks to the contributions of the hip-hop artists, this ethnography is arguably more rigorous than if it had relied solely on my observations and my attempts to interpret the social world. In describing dialogical ethnography as a “remix”, I have adopted a hip-hop concept to describe academic research as a shared cultural product which integrates the creativity of the author with the creative contributions of many others. Working alongside the hip-hop artists with my camera, making music videos with them, allowed me to become part of Grahamstown’s hip-hop family, and to establish rapport as a fellow media producer. The hip-hop artists’ contributions have spurred a range of ethical concerns on how one may acknowledge such contributions, while at the same time protecting the participants from harm.

Chapter Three: Hustling for Dignity

If we understand digital media ecologies as emerging out of the interplay of people, technologies and the social and cultural world of a specific place (Horst et al., 2010), then it is important to have a thorough understanding of the values and social meanings that underpin this social and cultural world. This chapter seeks to understand how the world of the township is experienced and made sense of by hip-hop artists who live there. Most of the understandings emerged from long discussions with artists on the meaning of their hip-hop lyrics. It therefore follows a phenomenological approach to understanding the environment.

The primary insight that emerged was that the hip-hop artists were hugely concerned with issues of dignity. They were very much aware that unemployed young people were seen as “useless” and that people looked down on their neighbourhoods for being blighted by endemic violence and crime. In their music they tried to explain how such criminality was an aggressive, nihilistic response to a society in which unemployed black people were still not valued. While trying to explain criminal tendencies in these “ghetto” environments from an empathetic position, they were also trying to resist these by constructing other paths to dignity and social worth for themselves based in aspirations in the cultural and music industries. Others in the community saw them as harbouring inappropriate ambitions for their social station, and they expressed this as gossip, which the hip-hop artists found particularly hurtful. Most of the hip-hop songs focused on aspiration and hope and contrasted this with the nihilism and verbal and physical aggression of others in the face of such aspirations.

In trying to make sense of a social world primarily concerned with dignity, I found the work of Bourdieu (1995, 2005) particularly useful, as he argues that struggles for dignity are at the centre of the reproduction of social inequality. As his work is also based in notions of practice and the meanings that emerge from everyday practices, Bourdieu seemed well suited to Horst et al.’s (2010) media ecologies approach and their focus on environments constituted through practices. Sennet and Cobb (1972) expanded on Bourdieu’s understandings by providing an explanation for understanding the conflict that emerges among the marginalised in their struggle for dignity and which prevent them from recognising and confronting an oppressive unequal society. What was surprising to me was that in discussions with hip-hop artists racial oppression was constantly referred to, but not in relation to political struggles, in

terms of a search for a sense of worth, hope and dignity as a black person in a world that was perceived as pervasively white. As notions of worth and inherent dignity in South Africa are still linked to race and the performance of a sufficiently assimilated Westernised identity (Mbembe, 2011), this meant that Fanon's (2008/1952) understandings of the extreme disavowal of any human dignity for a black person assimilated into Western culture is particularly useful here.

Horst et al's (2010) digital media ecologies classifies the digital media practices of young people in terms of broader overall practices, such as practices of friendship, within which such digital practices can be made sense of, which they call genres of participation. Couldry (2004) argues that uncovering a broader social practice within which media practices can be situated, often reveals much more about the meanings of such media practices than an audience study that is focused on media texts. This chapter locates hip-hop production in Grahamstown as a practice of dignity and self-worth, within which various digital media practices need to be situated in order to be understood.

3.1 The symbolic order, persistent inequality and dreams of meritocracy

South Africa, at the time of this study, and according to the latest figures, has the highest levels of inequality of any country in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 65 (World Bank, 2014). This economic inequality retains a marked racial quality which dramatically exceeds any comparison with other countries across the world where poverty takes on a racialised character (R. Burger, van der Berg, van der Walt, & Yu, 2016; Gradín, 2013). For example, black South Africans are 38 times as likely to be poor as white South Africans, while in the US and Brazil black citizens have only double or triple the poverty rate of whites (Gradín, 2013). This means that in South Africa poverty and deprivation still generally follow the racial patterns established by apartheid, despite the fact that levels of black deprivation have become less severe due to the social grant system (R. Burger et al., 2016).

While there has been some relief for the most destitute, in general there has been very little transformation of the racial character of the South African economy since liberation. Harvey (2007, p. 125) blames the continuation of apartheid into this "economic apartheid" on the fact that the newly democratic South African government was desperate to re-enter the global economy at the time, and was "persuaded and partly coerced" by the global forces of

neoliberalism, the World Bank and the IMF to adopt market-driven neoliberal policies instead of investing in social transformation. These policies, which were also championed by South African white capital in a series of scenario workshops with government, led to massive job losses in production when the South African economy opened up to global trade, due to dropping of both protective tariffs and decentralisation subsidies (Bond, 2000). At the same time, the policy of Black Economic Empowerment and affirmative action allowed for the co-option of the black elite, and in the twenty years after the fall of apartheid the black middle class of skilled white-collar workers had more than doubled (Bond, 2000; Seekings, 2015b).

Over the past twenty years, the most marked change to the South African economy has, however, been the dramatic shrinkage of jobs for less-skilled labour or the “core working-class” (Seekings, 2015b, p. 5). Seekings (2015a) shows that class formation has resulted in divisions, with the black middle class¹³ now generally underestimating the hardship encountered by the black working and lower classes, and distinguishing themselves on the basis of social and cultural clues. On the basis of these findings, Seekings (2015b) calls for an engagement with the work of Bourdieu, to understand how social formation is underpinned by issues of meaning and the cultural dimensions of class.

Bourdieu (1989) argues that inequality is legitimised by “symbolic power”, which is a process that associates greater worth to the dominant by conveying superior value to the social networks, cultural dispositions and resources that are associated with their lifestyles. In this way dominance is legitimised by factors which are made to appear to be independent of such dominance, but which are in fact directly related. Bourdieu (1986b) defines these social and cultural factors as forms of embodied capital, like economic capital they allow people to accumulate advantage. All capital, whether economic capital or such embodied capital, he argues, takes time to acquire, and thus resists change, and supports the inertia of the social world. The forms of embodied capital consist of social capital, which is the value of one’s social network and the resources they provide access to, and cultural capital. Cultural capital consists of three forms: embodied cultural capital of dispositions and tastes, objectified cultural capital of cultural goods such as pictures and books, and institutionalised cultural capital of educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986b). To acquire highly valued cultural

¹³ Meanwhile the white middle and upper classes continue to justify their privileges, not only by associating the black lower classes with hopelessness and chaos, but also by criticising the black middle classes for their displays of wealth in the face of poverty, while not acknowledging their own lack of commitment to transformation (Steyn & Foster, 2008).

capital one therefore invariably needs the time and resources and social capital of those who are dominant in society. The dominant are therefore able to assert their superiority through a process of distinction in which they assert their superior worth through their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986a). In this way the unfair advantage of the dominant is masked, and society appears to be structured based on merit, an illusion others have called “the meritocracy myth” (McNamee & Miller, 2004). However, the very definition of merit is based on the unfair advantaged offered through cultural capital. In South Africa, for example, the cultural capital of fluency in English generally defines economic success. Swartz et al. (2012) show how in accepting this meritocracy myth, poor black youth in South Africa’s townships define impossible dreams for their futures, and blame themselves for not being able to achieve these, without recognising the structural disadvantages they are subject to, such as inferior quality schooling and lack of social connection.

The hip-hop artists in my study, most of whom were unemployed and living precarious lives, like Swartz et al.’s (2012) research participants, fostered dreams of social mobility despite their structural disadvantages. Most of them were not working, and had finished school a few years ago, as they were mostly in their twenties. Like the vast majority of Grahamstown’s young people who went to under-resourced dysfunctional township schools, they either had not passed matric, or did not have high enough marks to allow them entry into higher education. A few had attempted further study, but all but one had dropped out halfway – generally because they could not access the funding they expected, or could not achieve adequate marks. They were essentially “stuck” as there were very few opportunities available for them having not only no economic capital, but also not the right cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986b). One could describe these young people as part of a “liminal generation” who like many other young people on the continent were in limbo between adolescence and adulthood (Cruise O’Brien, 1996, p. 58).

In the context of this study of hip-hop artists in the Eastern Cape, IThala Lenyani’s¹⁴ story illustrates how such liminality can produce guilt and anxiety, especially when there were high expectations of social mobility. He had a big round face with bushy eyebrows and easy smile, was broad-shouldered and liked to wear perfectly tailored African shirts he had sewn himself. IThala Lenyani chose his hip-hop name to celebrate intellectual skills – it

¹⁴ IThala Lenyani is this young man’s hip-hop stage name, and he is insistant on its unusual capitalisation. As I explain in Chapter 2, I have in consultation with hip-hop artists agreed to use their stage names to reflect each individual contribution to hip-hop in Grahamstown, while also providing a degree of anonymity.

means “The Library of the Mind”. At school, he had always done well, and had dreamt about becoming a lawyer and making his mother, who was a domestic worker and single parent, proud. However, despite his good marks at school, he received a diploma pass in the final exams but did not do well enough to enter a university. This discrepancy between expected and achieved results was not uncommon, as in my journalistic work with schools I had come across several people involved in school management who spoke about how common it was for township schools to inflate marks. Like many young people from township backgrounds, he chose not to blame his poor results on the poor quality of his schooling (Swartz, 2009, p. 130; Swartz et al., 2012), instead he blamed himself.

IThala Lenyani spoke with sadness about how he felt he had disappointed his mother, who had suffered under apartheid and that he, a “born free”, was expected to use the opportunities she did not have and achieve something. Like working-class young people elsewhere, he was stuck in a dilemma where his parent’s sacrifices in an unrewarding job would be rendered meaningless if he did not move up in the world (Sennett & Cobb, 1972). He wanted to make her feel proud, and he felt guilty that he had not. Like many of his friends, he was now at home, depending on her small income as a domestic worker to survive. He compared himself to a calf that had never been weaned. For him this state of affairs was not right. It was against the natural order of things, especially as a man in Xhosa culture was expected to be able to care for others financially. He cared deeply for his mother, who had raised him and his younger brother on her own, and who in his eyes was like an honorary father in their house, since she carried the responsibility of home finances. Yet he was worried that he would end up not being the head of the house one day, but the “tail”, the one who always depended on a woman.

His particular situation illustrates the anxiety many young men face in terms of their masculinity in a culture where men are culturally expected to provide, but semi-skilled working class jobs have disappeared (Gibbs, Sikweyiya, & Jewkes, 2014; Hunter, 2004; Morrell, Jewkes, & Lindegger, 2012; Mosoetsa, 2011). Many of the young men in this study had spent a few months in another town or city with distant relatives to help overcome their boredom and frustration. They exchanged their lack of social mobility with physical mobility that helped them feel less “stuck” and allowed them to form new social relations. IThala Lenyani spent his second year out of school in Uitenhage, near Port Elizabeth, where he completed a course with the African Hebrew Israelites, with a certificate to show for it. Back in Grahamstown, he was trying hard to get into a college, to set up a small project, applying for bursaries, sending out letters, but there seemed to be no money for anything. He was

determined not to give up, and would often come to my office for help sending yet another application.

“If you’re not working, people see you as useless,” he said. Indeed Mbembe’s (2011) comments that South Africa’s large masses of unemployed were now not considered worthy of anything, not even to be exploited as cheap labour. However, from my observations, IThala Lenyani was not trying to find employment as cheap labour, but was set on an “aspirational ethic”, the ideal for increasingly more South Africans (James, 2012, p. 24) to get into higher education or an office job. He had decided to bear unemployment and wait until a better opportunity would come around, so engaging in a “politics of waiting”, which Dawson (2014, p. 868) argues is common for young South African township men and based in a recognition of the exploitation of those in menial jobs and expectations of imminent change. In between writing proposals, negotiating with distant family, applying for university programmes and funding, IThala Lenyani was writing poetry and hip-hop lyrics. In his performances, he could be a man, showing off his complex wielding of the isiXhosa language and his knowledge of traditional culture, mocking and playfully teasing others who could not come close to his level of verbal skill. It was difficult sitting at home, trying to stay focused on a better future and not to feel stuck as other people who had completed school in the same year were now nearly graduating from university, he said. In a black working-class family, the stress of having a hip-hop artist who was not working could create a lot of tension, but often this would be accepted as a better alternative than a son who was violent and “on the streets”, local hip-hop leader XNasty explained.

The hip-hop artists’ ability to retain belief in their imminent success can be attributed to the growing power of the imaginary in an increasingly globalised world (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31). Hip-hop in particular is a globalised genre that promotes an imaginary of such “striving” social mobility (Smith, 2003). Such imaginaries have particular power in times of social change. The very different futures poor parents imagine for their children as they are growing up, may create radically different dispositions in young men from similar backgrounds (MacLeod, 2009). Macleod (2009) shows how in the Chicago ghetto a predominantly African American group of youth known as the ‘Brothers’ were much more orientated towards success and education than a rival predominantly white and violently criminal crew called ‘The Hallway Hangers’, and explains this in terms of the hope their Civil Rights era parents nurtured as they assumed racism was disappearing in the USA, and thus encouraged higher aspirations in their children. In the modern African imaginary the

notion of ‘progress’ is an expectation of success based on development’s promises of a new, prosperous future (Cornwall, 2007). One may expect the parents of these South African hip-hop artists, who were mostly born in the nineties, to have hosted particularly high hopes for their children with the advent of the post-apartheid democracy with its promises of development for all. Hip-hop artists would constantly verbalise such hopeful futures to me, which made these verbal assertions appear like mantras that could magically invoke success through their articulation. While some wondered why fame was taking so long to achieve, or complained about the lack of opportunities in town, I never heard anyone expressing any disillusion in terms of their future, or bemoan their fate. Perhaps that would be seen as an expression of defeat and of accepting the lower status offered to them by society.

IThala Lenyani’s story probably illustrates most acutely such hopes of social mobility due to his relatively good school results. Whether one could indeed acquire a job if one lowered your expectations was, however, also questionable. Only a few of the hip-hop artists had part-time job contracts such as security guards, shop assistants or unskilled road builders. Having such a working-class job did not always make life easier for the hip-hop artists. Midway through the field research, hip-hop producer Busta stopped doing hip-hop to take up a job building roads that made him so exhausted that he could no longer do hip-hop and his friends hardly saw him anymore. Busta was one of the first hip-hop producers I had met, and at the start of the study he had a buzzing little backyard studio full of young men who came to watch him mix songs on his secondhand Pentium computer. In his hip-hop crew he was the quiet, unassuming and slightly clumsy one, who giggled at other people’s jokes and expressed himself through his technical skills. He had a shaved “cheezkop” head and a pencil moustache and struggled to express himself in English, except when he was talking about software or computer parts, or the baby boy who would curl up in his lap and fall asleep while he was working. When I arranged to meet him one weekend after he had got the new job, I commented that he would at least now have some money to save towards a new computer. However, he responded dejectedly that since he was a father, most of his money was going towards the mother’s family, who had claimed damages from his family.

For these young men marriage was impossible, as they could not afford the traditional lobola bride price. Young men did not seem particularly concerned about this, and it did not stop them having serious relationships – several of the older hip-hop artists had fathered children with long-time girlfriends. As they moved towards their late twenties, I noticed that hip-hop artists started to become less involved, to question what their investment in hip-hop

had brought them, and they tended to move into the casual workforce for longer periods of time. Nova and Retaliation, who seemed to have endless time to work on hip-hop tracks three years before, later became caught up for stints of several months as security guards, shop assistants and builders. When I first met them, these two hip-hop artists from the “coloured area” were inseparable. Nova lived in a little shack outside a relative’s house, but one would never guess his humble abode from his cool shades, puffy sleeveless hoodie and spotless sneakers. Retaliation lived around the corner, looking after his aunt’s RDP house while she was working in Cape Town. He was short, chubby and always cracking jokes and lived with his girlfriend who left him with her smartphone in the day while she worked as cashier. He and Nova explored all the functions of that Samsung Galaxy III together and from there they moved on to each getting their own secondhand computer and becoming experts in the new software. They called themselves MIF Entertainment, and had high hopes that they might become famous, both in South Africa and internationally. At the end of the study Retaliation was a shop assistant and Nova was working part time as a builder. When I came across him he had a new baby and had not seen Retaliation for months. Perhaps as the liminal period of the twenties was coming to an end and adult responsibilities became more pressing, it became harder to sustain dreams of success through hip-hop, or of the “meritocracy myth” (McNamee & Miller, 2004) in general.

Hip-hop artists Ako and Black Magic express some of their disillusionment with such dreams of social mobility in their track “Imizamo”, which tells the story of a young man who reflects back on the troubles of his life, of living with poverty every day, being constantly mocked by others in the community, and never being able to hold onto a job.

*Ndiziva ndilusizi xandibek'imizamo
ephepheni
Bendikade ndilixhoba lendlala behlekisa
ngam ekuhlaleni
...AbaNtu bandifulathela ndatshonelwa
lilang'emi
Inqgondo yayithath'ibeka
imisebenzi endandiyifumana
kungona ndiluma ndiyeka ngenxa yongazi*

I feel miserable when I write about my efforts
I used to be a victim of poverty, people mocked me in the community
...People turned their backs on me, the sun set for me at midday
I was not focused,
I would just abandon jobs because of confusion and inexperience ¹⁵

¹⁵ IsiXhosa translations reproduced in this dissertation have been certified as correct by Rhodes University African Language major Hons graduates Sanele Ntshingana and Babalwa Resha.

The song contrasts the expectations of social mobility with the frustrations of reality, particularly in the refrain *Ndakwiqela ela lilind' ukuza kukanxele* “I was part of a group waiting for things that would never happen” – illustrating the despair of a generation that grew up under the promise of democracy and social mobility, but find themselves scrambling for the little there is to go around. In the next few verses, the young man expresses the redemptive power of music to transform his life.

Kodwa bathi ithemba alidanisi
Ndiza kuqhubekeka ndibhala kuba lo mculo
kula makhamandela uzondikhulula X3
kudala ndizama zama (zama zama)
ndizophumelela (phumelela)

*But they say hope doesn't disappoint
I'll continue to write because this music,
from being trapped and tied up, it will untie me
It's been so long I've been trying
I will succeed*

In this manner, hip-hop artists manage to re-insert themselves into imagining an alternative pathway towards social mobility through hip-hop.

3.2 Distinction and the discourse of meritocracy

In South Africa, where race and class are conflated, symbolic power helps to reinforce racism, and the vast number of black South Africans without any jobs are, as Mbembe (2011) describes, simply considered worthless. XNasty traced this racist symbolic order back to apartheid: “ever since you were growing up your parents were told they were nothing”. He linked the sense of inferiority many black people experience to the shame induced in black South Africans throughout colonialism and apartheid that Biko (1978) had articulated so powerfully. Working in the gardens of white people, or scrubbing their floors, the older generation were conditioned to be ashamed of who they were, he said, which was not only about being poor, but also about being black, and considered incapable and unworthy to do any other job. They wanted their children to be “better than them”, XNasty explained, to overcome the sense of degradation they felt. XNasty, who had a new baby and spent quite some time looking after her, was worried that people did not see housework, and working with children, as having any value. He had become aware how much skill and patience it required. Why would a domestic worker say “‘better than me’ as if she was not better?” he asked. The particular cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986b) associated with the skills needed for different types of jobs in South Africa thus created a vast symbolic gulf between the value attributed to people holding different types of jobs, resulting in people considering

themselves better or lesser than others. As “better” jobs had, under apartheid, been reserved for certain races, and race still played a factor in the allocation of jobs post-apartheid (Gradín, 2013), such notions of symbolic value were therefore underpinned by a racially defined economy.

Lamont and Molnár (2002) have described how symbolic boundaries vary between different countries, being less extreme in countries with a history of discourses in which the humanity of working-class people were recognised, such as France with its history of Catholicism, the revolution, and socialism. In the USA, this sense that poor people were “people like us” was clearly absent (Lamont & Molnár, 2002), as it arguably is in South Africa. It seems impossible, with the persistence of extreme inequality, that most South Africans, particularly those in the middle or upper class, and especially whites, imagine those who work in menial jobs or are unemployed as “people like us”. However, such building of symbolic boundaries can no longer be allocated only to whites. Telzak’s (2012; 2014) recent research shows how the black middle class distinguish themselves from their poorer relatives by emphasising their laziness and lack of initiative.

The participants in this study cited many examples that illustrated the growing class divisions among black South Africans living in townships. While one should recognise that there had always been class divisions in townships, with the rise of neoliberal policies and an “aspiration ethic” (James, 2012), one may assume that symbolic divisions take on increased importance. In Grahamstown’s townships this sense of symbolic hierarchy was not articulated directly, but, as in Bourdieu’s (1986b) study of distinction in France, was created through the display of consumer goods, such as fashion, where those who could not afford them were branded as vulgar or tasteless, and thus worthless. ULizwi chose not to be part of this fashion competition by dressing in alternative African dress.

ULizwi: The richer people they also have tendency of looking down to other people. I don’t want to say poor people but they look down on poor people the way they dress. So that’s what I also said is also a classism, you know in the township (Personal communication, 7 November 2014).

ULizwe was skinny with fine features and thick dreadlocks and always wore an African shirt with strings of beaded necklaces. He had a gentle soft-spoken nature and loved getting involved in the intricacies of language – whether this was obscure isiXhosa dialects or the many computer languages he was trying to master. He became very emotional when

discussing such materialism and snobbery. Many of the other hip-hop artists described how hurtful they find this exclusion of poor people who could not afford to dress in what was considered an acceptable way. Zion Eyes (Personal communication, 15 August 2014), an outspoken activist for the rights of the poor, shared a story where people would say “go back to the village, man” if you were not wearing branded sneakers like Nike or Puma. Having the right consumer goods was here clearly aligned with being a properly modern and urbanised citizen, as in Cooper’s (2009) study of young South Africans, as opposed to an uneducated country bumpkin. Therefore the lack of consumer goods positioned a person as not adequately modern, so mobilising outdated development discourses with an implicit racism, where the rural and the traditional African life was associated with inferiority (see Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964).

For Dezz, who was a committed church man, dressing up was reserved for Sundays, and he liked to sport his three-piece Sunday suit in the isiXhosa hip-hop videos he made to promote his Mormon faith. Dezz was particularly upset about the Izikhotane subculture (see eNCA, 2012) which engaged in a form of conspicuous consumption, and he described how young men would parade in designer clothes and then take them off and destroy them publicly, spraying J&B whiskey on the clothes and then tearing them up. Dezz could not understand how one could tear up a shirt costing six hundred rand, and saw this as a form of disrespect towards people who did not have anything and struggled to put food on the table. For him, conspicuous fashion was just a form of showing off, of “swagger” and his crew were proud of the fact that among their friends they did not “do swagger”. As Howell and Vincent (2014) point out, the Izikhotane consumption practices need to be understood as both revering the tastes and consumption patterns of the black middle class, while also transcending this through destruction of such goods, so signifying a defiance of these young people’s exclusion from the economy. It can thus be understood as an aggressive response to the creation of symbolic boundaries through the cultural capital of a refined sense of taste (Bourdieu, 1986a). However, in adopting the same tastes of high fashion, they did not attempt to question the symbolic boundaries that accrued more value to the “refined” higher classes, but merely included themselves in this hierarchy while excluding other township residents who could not put up such performances of style, or as Dezz put it “those who do not have”. In this way their display of resistance simply replicated the existing symbolic order, as other examples of class rage have done elsewhere (Willis, 1981).

Forms of distinction also extended into the display of digital technology, where a smartphone was a symbol of success, and access to social networks such as Facebook or WhatsApp was a sign of having these types of phones.

Zion Eyes: People don't interact with you if you don't have money, you don't have everything. If I cannot find you on WhatsApp then you are still useless, man, we cannot use you man, we need people who have WhatsApp and Facebook and Twitter (Personal communication, 15 August 2014).

These various examples therefore show how symbolic power is enacted through performances of distinction through fashion and technology. Meritocratic discourses that legitimate a person's rise into a higher class position (McNamee & Miller, 2004) are, however, challenged by evidence that raise questions related to the virtue of the wealthy, such as the people my participants described as "criminal families" who were involved in activities as slumlords or moneylenders, and enforced their rules with violence. They had high status in the community due to the fact that they had money, and could not only display their wealth, but could even offer employment. ULizwi blamed these families and the appalling way they treated their workers as the most worrying form of classism that was emerging in the townships. Like the nouveaux riche elsewhere (Bourdieu, 1986a), these slumlords and moneylenders had not yet been able to acquire the cultural capital that allowed them to assume legitimacy and mask the exploitation on which their relative material advantage was based.

The hip-hop artists in this study therefore were to some extent critical of the processes of distinction that enabled those who were wealthier to look down on them. As Sayer (2005) argues, Bourdieu's claim that people will always naturalise the symbolic order does not always hold true, as there are many examples of ordinary people who are critical of discourses of legitimisation of domination. Through hip-hop these young people were able to establish a counter narrative in which they extolled the virtues of the poor and the destitute. What made the symbolic order particularly powerful, however, was the violence in which it was embedded.

3.3 Structural and symbolic violence and the violence it provokes

The social forces that structure poverty and racism in society should not be seen as abstract factors, because they are embodied as suffering – distress, disease, risks of rape and violence and early death – and the trauma they cause in individual bodies means they should therefore

be conceptualised as a form of violence, structural violence (Farmer, 1996). The systemic nature of racialised poverty in South Africa can thus be conceptualised as a form of violence, because macro-economic policies place a low premium on public spending and job creation (Bond, 2000), which have real effects on the lives of the poor. It has resulted in more than 20% of South African citizens living at the food poverty line, thus nearly starving, while 37% of South African citizens have to choose between purchasing food or other basic survival needs such as transport (Nicolson, 2015).

Structural violence plays out in the health, policing and education sectors. Mayosi and Benatar (2014, p. 1344) argue that extreme poverty is directly related to “diseases of poverty” such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and maternal and child mortality, which predominantly affect the poor. The lack of spending in public healthcare and the growth of diseases of poverty have meant that public health is desperately understaffed (Mayosi & Benatar, 2014). South Africa has one of the highest violent crime rates in the world, with the most reliable crime statistic, the murder rate, being about five times higher than the global average (Africa Check, 2014). Crime, particularly violent crime, disproportionately affects poor communities (Silber & Geffen, 2009). The lack of funding for community policing has meant that efforts to address social factors related to crime are no longer prioritised (Gordon, 2009). While the biggest government social spending increase after 1994 was in the education sector, this mainly benefited black teachers, and had limited impact on improving education for the poor (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). South Africa still effectively has two education systems, where discrepancies between the school infrastructure, the content knowledge of teachers and the culture of learning in schools result in learners from township schools being about two years behind their privileged counterparts (Spaull, 2013). Given the dramatic decline in jobs for the semi-skilled (Seekings, 2015a), such educational disparities effectively doom the majority of those in township and rural schools to unemployment. Low-income youth see tertiary study as the only path out of poverty (Telzak, 2012), but despite the availability of a government loan system for young people from low-income families¹⁶ providing some access to higher education, only 9% of pupils from schools in the poorest areas achieve adequate school marks to qualify for university or colleges (Van Broekhuizen, van der Berg, & Hofmeyr, 2016).

¹⁶ Despite the availability of loans for qualifying school leavers from low-income families, these have not been sufficient for the increasing number of young people who qualify.

The Eastern Cape has arguably been subject to more structural violence than any other province in South Africa. The income it generates has historically served to enrich the Western Cape (Peires, 2011), and as the poorest, least resourced and administratively the weakest province at the time of democratic transition, it has inherited extraordinary burdens compared to others parts of the country (Ruiters, 2011). Since the 1980s, retrenchments in the mining sector have had a disproportionate impact on people in this region and the province is considered “a dumping ground for surplus people” (Ruiters, 2011, p. 8). Moreover, as an urban rural town, Grahamstown is emblematic for its structural problems related to infrastructure and service delivery resulting from a lack of skills and poor implementation of regulations (Koelble & LiPuma, 2010), so exacerbating structural violence.

In reaction to structural violence, and a social world characterised by risk and deprivation, one could therefore expect an insecure, violent society. Various South African scholars (Bruce, 2007; Gibbs et al., 2014; Hunter, 2004; Morrell et al., 2012; Selikow, Zulu, & Cedras, 2002) show how black South African men from low-income areas or townships adopt nihilistic violent practices associated with male identity. These scholars have been studying the seemingly incomprehensible promiscuous lifestyles of black South African township men at a time when the risks of contracting AIDS in this country are exceedingly high. They found an entrenched notion of masculinity which conflated promiscuity, conspicuous consumption of fashion and high-status goods, excessive use of alcohol, violent¹⁷ and even criminal behaviour in the identity of the township playboy, “playa” or “isoka”. Morrell et al. (2012), drawing on Connell (1987), describe this identity as the hegemonic masculinity of the township, which does not necessarily mean that most young men adopt this violent masculinity, but that it is hegemonic in the sense that it is symbolically associated with an idealised identity for young men to demonstrate their masculinity in this space. In “ghetto” environments, young men may adopt a violent disposition as a badge of dignity and a way of signaling that they remain “unbroken” (Richardson & Skott-Myhre, 2012).

Many of the hip-hop artists spoke with great concern about the thuggish masculinity that thrived in the township and made it a violent, chaotic space. A handful of them had started to drift off into that violent space when they were in their early teens, and told me how dangerous life was for boys of that age who were always targeted by gangs of older boys. At

¹⁷ Morrell (2012) does not only attribute violent identities to black South African men, but argues that it is a characteristic of most men in South Africa.

fourteen, they wanted to prove that they were independent young men, which meant walking around on their own, showing off their mobile phones. Eventually this group of friends became tired of always being stopped at knife-point to hand over cell phones or shoes to the gangs. They formed their own gang, a large group of 14-year-old boys, where each assault on a member had to be avenged on the culprit's family members, so that others would know that they were no longer easy targets. Soon they were part of a violent knife culture, and taking advice from older hardened thugs who had been to prison. Once they became involved with hip-hop, they left the teenage gang behind. However, they still kept tabs on some of those who stayed in this thug lifestyle, and pointed out that many of them were now in prison, and quite a few were dead. These anecdotes reveal the everyday nature of violence in this space, and how it is driven by desperation and cycles of revenge.

There is indeed a danger that ethnographic descriptions such as this dissertation, which describes a violent nihilistic culture of township youth, may be used to reinforce racist discourses and blame these communities for their own lack of progress, and so demonise black youth. Ethnographic research of the black American ghetto in the mid-twentieth century was characterised by discourses replicated in the media that blamed people for their “inadequate values” that produced a “culture of poverty” which they suggested actually caused poverty (Lamont & Small, 2008, p. 79). This ideology is still common in scholarship, where the poor are divided into “good” and “bad”, “undeserving” and “deserving” and only those who manage to get jobs and hold onto them are deemed worthy (Wacquant, 2002, p. 1506). One cannot simply judge the illicit behaviour of others in the ‘hood without acknowledging the desperate circumstances of survival they confront daily, as Venkatesh's (2002, p. 93) ghetto participants stressed.

Crime was, however, not just about protection and survival in this space, according to the hip-hop artists, but also about having no sense of hope or your own value. Zion Eyes spent a lot of time talking to troubled youth in his community, and he explained how lack of feelings of self-worth were one of the most dangerous triggers of violence:

Zion Eyes: “I don't care, even if I die”, it's those kinds of feelings. When you start to think like that “I don't care even if I die” then you are messed up, you need some help. Because now you can do anything, because you think you can go to prison, it doesn't matter, you can die, it doesn't matter, life does not mean anything to you. So to me, it bothers me and I'm concerned about that (Personal communication, 15 August 2014).

Zion Eyes was a passionate speaker, who could tell intriguing stories of his neighbourhood that weaved together anger, humour and hope. A hip-hop artist with piercing eyes and big teeth who liked to wear striking outfits like a cowboy hat and West African suit, he defied conventions by rapping on street corners for hours or spending the night drumming around fires on the mountain with local Rastafarians. Through his involvement in activism and the local newspaper, he had managed to build up contacts and skills so that he was able to enroll for a degree at Rhodes University based on his abilities in writing and political analysis. In the week he lived on campus, but returned on occasional weekends to stay in his shack in the backyard of his granny's house, who had raised him on her pension.

He had always been a misfit in this community, and had felt burdened by gossipers his entire life who judged him for wanting to be different and for calling himself an artist and a poet. He felt persecuted and attacked. This seemed worse now that he was at university, and he felt that this jealousy and animosity was linked to their own lack of hope. Zion Eyes was particularly bothered by the fact that there was no political programme to address this sense of despair and lack of meaning young people faced, and that no one seemed to care about the hopelessness they felt about having no future. He spoke about the meaningless cycle of getting up with nothing to look forward to, washing, sitting around, walking in the streets, drinking and smoking with friends just as angry as oneself, going to sleep, and then doing it all over again for months on end. He was convinced this cycle of monotonous hopelessness, which he described as a "chain", could drive one mad, and make you do "what is not predicted". This is what he thought had happened to the young man who had raped an elderly woman in his community. Young men were supposed to respect older women and treat them like mothers, so his crime was nearly unthinkable. He could not understand how someone could get into "the feeling of doing that...as a human being". Zion Eyes was concerned about the crime, but even more concerned that no one seemed to notice how despair was changing people, making them enraged, robbing them of their humanity, and making them do things that were against the natural order of things. One may understand this despair to result from the legitimacy symbolic power granted to such structural violence, a legitimacy Bourdieu (2003) describes as "symbolic violence". The symbolic violence that underpins South Africa's structural violence thus makes such injustices and inequalities seem inevitable, so that those suffering such structural violence struggle to assert the possibility for change and are often only left with despair.

3.4 Gossip and “haters” and the internalisation of oppression

What the hip-hop artists found particularly disorientating though was how such despair made people turn against each other and undermine the dreams of success of their peers with aggressive verbal dismissals or “gossip”. Many of the hip-hop artists spoke of such “gossip” in terms of people who were “broken” and who had not been exposed to black consciousness. As they were his fellow black peers, Zion Eyes had empathy with these gossipers and their lack of knowledge of the effects of their words to destroy others.

Zion Eyes: That’s what now I’m trying to break now, so that people can find ways of helping each other instead of just destroying each other...actually emotionally without them knowing. ‘Cos they don’t know that they are destroying each other (Personal communication, 15 August 2014).

The black consciousness philosophy of South African activist Steve Biko was an inspiration to Grahamstown hip-hop artists and many of them had read his books and quoted from them extensively. Biko (1978, p. 100) urged blacks to believe in their own potential and their own agency and to reject the “inferiority complex” produced by the psychological oppression of living in a racist society. He foresaw the problematic inherent in a transformation that was only focused on overcoming explicit racism, but did not recognise the domination of white culture and values, so that racial integration became characterised by assimilation into white society (More, 2008, p. 57). Colonialism justified the extreme exploitation of black persons by equating blackness with brutality, lack of culture or human empathy and, through the imposition of colonial religion, language and education, made black persons complicit in accepting this dehumanisation of themselves (Oliphant, 2008). Biko’s philosophy of black consciousness draws extensively on Fanon to provide a strategy for reclaiming agency and humanity so that the black person is able to resist being positioned as an object construed through lack, and may take on the agency of a human subject (More, 2008; Wilderson, 2008). When hip-hop artists in this study talk about black consciousness, this needs to be understood in terms of how Biko understood it, not simply as a process of mental awareness, but of actively reclaiming agency: as making choices and embarking on actions. More (2008) describes Biko’s terminology:

Conscientization is that process which brings to the consciousness of black people the task of taking charge of their destiny, of resolutely taking responsibility for who they are and the choices they make, of committing

themselves to authentic possibilities, taking over their freedom, uniqueness, and resolutely engaging in the projects through which they create themselves (More, 2008, p. 62).

Black consciousness therefore embraces agency to defy the symbolic order and take up subject positions denied to black people, while gossip here tends to maintain dominant social norms and keep people “in their place”. IThala Lenyani complained that “gossipers” said that you were only a real man if you drank, smoked and slept around. You had to be dirty, wearing an overall and “working in construction”, he said. This clearly shows how a proper masculinity in this space is tied to a working-class identity associated with promiscuity and substance abuse. It was difficult to make sense of why community members in the townships would want to discourage each other, instead of standing together to challenge the lack of opportunities available to them. Bourdieu (1995) offers some answers to this dilemma in his theorisation of the “habitus”, which acts as a “strategy generating principle” to enable a person to react to a variety of situations, and encompasses a set of tastes, principles and actions which are embodied in the individual. The habitus, inculcated from childhood, internalises structural conditions and trains people to accept their situation. If structural forces conspire to prevent them from accessing opportunities, it allows them to rationalise this by “refusing what they were refused”, claiming “that’s not for the likes of us” (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 471). While his focus on capital has meant that many have misread Bourdieu as postulating the struggle of human existence to be driven merely by self-interest and the accumulation of various forms of capital, his main message roots the struggles between different classes in a quest for dignity and to escape the judgement of others (Wacquant, 1998b). Here thus, people refuse to attempt the acquisition of cultural capital that seems out of their reach to retain their dignity. Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus is therefore the unconscious personal assimilation of the “rules of the game”, through which young people internalised their own oppression, but also generated a sense of dignity for their position in society, so both accepting and replicating the symbolic order.

If it is fitting to recall that the dominated always contribute to their own domination, it is necessary at once to be reminded that the dispositions which incline them to this complicity are also the effect, embodied, of domination (Bourdieu 1989, p. 12; Wacquant's translation and emphasis cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 24).

Thus, the township men IThala Lenyani encountered displayed dispositions habituated to a society in which black people had been limited to working-class jobs, accepted the dirty physical nature of such jobs, and dealt with stress through alcohol. They accepted this not under duress, but proudly. In opposition to the symbolic violence that questioned their worth and dismissed them as incompetent, dirty and drunk, they were claiming back their dignity through relabelling these symptoms of oppression as qualities of toughness and a badge of honour. In this manner, their habitus reproduced their social position by constraining their ambitions and normalising their oppression as workers, making it a source of pride and dignity.

Bourdieu (1995) emphasises that the habitus works through affective processes of shame, disgust, and rejection that shape people from an early age. He explicitly mentions the affective power of gender and religion in constructing the habitus (Bourdieu, 1995). The affective power of gender is often used to produce a particular masculinity informed by class, where men are constructed as tough and true to their working-class roots, while women are symbolically aligned with the middle class (Ortner, 2006, p. 28). This construction of masculinity through class identity may explain why the symbolic violence perpetuated on these men is translated into violence against women, as they feel compelled to control women to redeem their own self-worth. They thus become particularly threatened by the potential social mobility of women. The precarious lives people live in Grahamstown townships because of poverty and the need to survive mean that young women seek out relationships where they can have some financial support. IThala Lenyani explained that if one had a girlfriend, she expected you to pay for make-up, nail treatment and a “Brazilian weave”, an expensive type of hair extension, and as this cost about two thousand rands, it was only possible if you were working. It was difficult as an unemployed young man, Zion Eyes lamented, not to become angry when one went out, and one saw successful people in the company of “all these beautiful women” who were unattainable for someone like oneself, and one “hardly had a girlfriend”. He explained that if one was not careful, this could make one hate women, and make one unable to appreciate their beauty and “use your powers against women”. This example illustrates how some men may construct a violent misogynist masculinity around constraining the class mobility of women. Various scholars (Waxman, Humphries, Frohlich, Dlamini, & Ntombela, 2016; Zembe, Townsend, Thorson, & Ekström, 2013) have pointed out how young women have resorted to transactional relationships with older men, both for purposes of survival and to acquire consumer goods.

Great Young Star, a dreadlocked, big young woman who wore long skirts and sneakers, was a skilled beat maker who generally avoided the company of other women. She lived with her little toddler girl in a small shack behind her mother's house, who helped out at the shebeen across the road owned by her uncle. When I met Great Young Star, she was running her own computer repair business while also volunteering for the department of social development in her neighbourhood. She was annoyed that women did not support each other to achieve success, but would get together for hours to get drunk and obsess about their boyfriends. Great Young Star considered herself lucky for having grown up playing with boys and therefore having acquired a "boy attitude", which she defined as being primarily focused on her own success instead of on acquiring boyfriends. It is useful to consider this claim in light of Bem's (1981) notion of the internalisation of a "gender schema" in childhood, a schema made up of mental associations between the self-concept, different behaviours and gender. Bem (1981) differentiates between the "sex-type" gender schema which is very restrictive, associating all interactions with the opposite sex in a sexual frame, and the "androgynous" gender schema which allows for a self-concept that is freer of gendered interpretations and, she argues, particularly advantageous for girls. This is because it allows them to approach interactions with the opposite sex outside of a sexual frame, and to embrace behaviours such as assertiveness and ambition, so making it easier for them to succeed in a male-dominated society. One may therefore argue that Great Young Star acquired an "androgynous" gender schema (Bem, 1981) through her childhood peer interactions, allowing her to confidently approach learning from male peers, and to embrace a certain assertiveness and ambition in her acquisition of "male" skills. Great Young Star spent her childhood dressed like a boy in shorts, and while she credits the other boys in her street for her freedom from gender norms, it may well be that her mother's lack of interest in enforcing these norms may have played an important part in shaping this attitude.

For young women who invest all their energy in cultivating multiple romantic relationships as a way of sustaining themselves as dependents of others, such relationships may make them subject to exploitative violent relationships (Zembe et al., 2013), and vulnerable to rape as a form of "punishment" by other men who brand them as promiscuous (Jewkes & Sikweyiya, 2013). There was indeed a high rate of abuse of women here, and this was one of the reasons Bliss, a bubbly female MC with an earthy style, had become a rapper, as she wanted to expose the levels of violence women had to deal with, and the injustice of this (Personal communication, 30 November 2013). Bliss was a fast talker with an easy laugh

who had natural dreads and a nose ring. She was excited that she was leaving Grahamstown to study graphic design in Johannesburg and hoped she might get a job there. In Grahamstown both men and women abused alcohol, and there was a culture where people drank so much that they could often hardly walk properly by the end of the evening, and were then easy prey for mobile phones thieves (Dezz, personal communication, 23 October 2014). Dezz was particularly worried about the women, who would wake up and not know in whose room they were the next day, and he could not understand how they could take the risk, with rape and assault so common in these areas. Despite being only 25 years old, Dezz exuded a sense of responsibility. He was always impeccably neat in a freshly ironed T-shirt and jeans with his shaved head and trimmed moustache. He reminded me of a cricket captain in his neatness and respect for rules. When he was younger, he told me, he also drank, but after being robbed too many times, he decided it was too risky and quit with the help of his church. Now he ran a big hip-hop group with many young teenage boys, and they were very explicit in their rules that if anyone was seen drinking, they would have to leave the group. He had experienced the destructive influence of alcohol, and while it helped one forget your problems, he knew it was destructive of the community and was not worth it. Alcohol exacerbated arguments, turning them into violent knife fights, so causing further distress, tragedy and chaos in the community. Thus misogyny, alcoholism and violence can be understood to be part of the “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1995) of this space, a habitus driven by misrecognition of the conditions of oppression and a desperation for dignity.

In society defined by racialised inequality, this meant that the habitus was also defined in terms of race and misrecognised racial oppression, by legitimising and taking pride in its effects on their daily lives. We may observe this by returning to the example of verbal attacks on IThala Lenyani. IThala Lenyani was neat and enjoyed dressing in African fashions, and did not drink at all, and for this he was called out for having “gay tendencies” and “acting white”. Such insults that questioned young men’s allegiance to their race and that police their actions can be further understood in terms of Fanonian internalisation (Fanon, 2008/1952). Here we may understand the gossipers or “haters” internalising the white racist concept of the “uppity nigger” (Armour, 1997) so that they would not allow IThala Lenyani to escape his proper “place” as a black man, a dirty object of oppression. The indignation of an internalised white racist response to this “presumptuous” behaviour arguably occurred at the same time in this gossipers’ mind as experiencing a deep hurt as a working-class black person at their lack of worth, so that the self was split into a white and a black part. Such observations of splits in the self, created through assimilation into a dominant white culture

were already documented a century ago, when Du Bois (1986/1903, p. 364) described the “veil of double consciousness” that emerges when one is “always looking at oneself through the eyes of others”.

About half a century later, Fanon, who may well have been influenced by Du Bois (Moore, 2005), developed a more in-depth theoretical model of this division of the self. Fanon (2008/1952, pp. 109–112) describes his theory through his personal experiences as a black man living in a colonial society and educated into white French values, and how he became aware of this contradiction when confronted with racism in France. He explains the psychological alienation inherent in such colonial societies by recounting a story of a white child who, on looking at a black man like him, says to his mother “Look, a negro! I am frightened”. He explains how such a statement suddenly makes one aware of one’s consciousness being located in a black body, a type of consciousness which he calls a “corporeal schema”, which splits the self into being at once aware of one’s own body’s blackness, but simultaneously aware of the dominant colonial narratives of black subjects and narratives of the barbaric with whom one was being associated, the “historico-racial schema” (Fanon, 2008/1952, p. 111). We may understand the child’s address in terms of ideological interpellation (Althusser, 2009, p. 105). Such ideological interpellation works by “recruiting” an individual to become a subject of a particular ideology through addressing or “hailing” that individual directly through a statement loaded with ideology, or specific assumptions originating in a system of power (Althusser, 2009, p. 105). It is through recognising themselves in the address that the individual transforms into a subject who submits to the assumptions implicit in the statement (Althusser, 2009). Thus, the black man of Fanon’s example, in listening to the address of the child, is invited to become the subject of colonial racist discourses where his humanity is denied, but as the child is referring only to his body, not addressing him as a person, this causes a double alienation. This example is somewhat deceptive, as the process of alienation is the product of a lifetime of being imbedded in a white world and subject to the critical white gaze.

Fanon (2008/1952, p. 14) developed his theory of how black individuals see themselves from the perspective of the white Other primarily in terms of personal trauma, or what he calls a “massive psycho-existential complex”, an individual focus which is understandable for his field of psychology. To understand the social dynamics that such alienation produces in black communities, it is useful to consider the work of sociologists Sennett and Cobb (1972) who documented the social effects of the class system on Polish and Italian immigrant workers in the USA. They describe how workers both resist and internalise

the class system, so that while they may recognise their own oppression, they also, on some psychological level, accept their position at the bottom of the hierarchy as shameful, so creating a “split between conscious belief and inner conviction” (Sennett & Cobb, 1972, p. 97). When other workers applied for promotion, they turned on them, because they experienced this as shameful and an attack on their dignity, since it drew attention to their own lack of progression, a lack which could only be made sense of through their lack of worth. Thus Sennett and Cobb (1972, p. 150) lament that “the system is left unchallenged as people enthralled by the enigmas of its power battle one another for respect”. We may combine Fanon and Sennett and Cobb’s approaches to develop an understanding of how internalisation of the dominant Other works in terms of both race and class in the township on a social level. Thus the “gossipers” who harass IThala Lenyani for his aspirations may be understood to experience his orientation to social mobility as shameful, since it accentuates their own stagnant position at the bottom of the social hierarchy, which, if they look at themselves through the masks of white society and the wealthy, can only be explained in their lack of worth and humanity.

The hip-hop artists’ conception of the lack of “consciousness” of such “haters” or gossipers can clearly be observed in XNasty’s and his friend Words’ decision to move out of the township, a move they justified by explaining that a “ghetto” space was designed to perpetuate apartheid mindsets, and could not accommodate “expanded minds” (Words, personal communication, 6 February 2014). Local hip-hop artists looked up to Words, who was an outsider from Port Elizabeth, but had managed to impress XNasty so much with his graphic design skills that he was now a trusted co-director of the Fingo Festival organisation. Words also had a folk band that was popular with both white and black students. He was a pious member of the Hebrew Israelites, but was also the ultimate cool networker who was persuasive and skilled at his craft. When one of the hip-hop artists was trying to explain that “hustling” in Grahamstown did not carry a criminal connotation, but was about celebrating a person who could make things happen through networking, he referred to Words as an example of such an ethical “hustler”. Words explained however that in the eyes of many others in the township he was seen to be smugly demonstrating his superiority as he owned a second-hand car, a luxury in this community. Instead of celebrating Words’ success and imagining possibilities for their own achievement, these township residents responded to his success with verbal aggression. As Words said: “you become a judge...of some sort...without even opening your mouth”. His relative achievement, like the relative achievement of Sennett and Cobb’s (1972) workers who became foremen, was thus

experienced by others in the township as embodying judgement of their own lack of achievement. Those who verbally attacked Words could therefore be considered to suffer from “hidden injuries of class” (Sennett & Cobb, 1972), which in a racialised economy like South Africa may therefore also be considered “hidden injuries of race”. If we consider these residents as objectifying themselves through the eyes of the other (Fanon, 2008/1952; Sennett & Cobb, 1972), such relative success made them extremely aware of their own stagnant low social position, and this low social position could for them only be explained through their worthlessness.

Words and XNasty continued to demonstrate their belonging and solidarity with the township through their organisational work. This was a difficult terrain to inhabit because those who left the township in a process of upward mobility were often blamed that one “forgot where you came from”. Words and XNasty took great pains to show that they did not buy into such “symbolic boundaries” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) through engaging with people and spending a lot of time in township areas. Unlike many in the emerging black middle class who viewed township residents with disdain (Telzak, 2012), they expressed a black solidarity. Their younger smooth-talking friend Oz considered himself a genius on his Apple Mac and prided himself on his digital blogging skills, and all three of them worked closely with the Grahamstown Creative City project to run a range of cultural development projects in town and in the township area, always conspicuous with their DSLR cameras and tablets as they captured the events for social media. Hip-hop artists like Words, XNasty and Oz, who now lived in Grahamstown’s historically mixed suburbs in between the formerly white suburbs and the township, seemed particularly aware of white privilege, and critical of whites who expected to have special treatment, such as the actors who insisted on rehearsing at the top of their voices while we were running a workshop in the venue next door (Xnasty, personal communication, 5 July 2013). Oz was particularly offended by the way white women smiled nervously at him and then quickly moved out of his way in the streets, as if he were dangerous (Personal communication, 13 May 2014). We may compare the nervous smiles of these white women with the objectifying gaze of Fanon’s (2008/1952) fearful white child, where these smiles construct Oz as the object of white fear, mobilising stereotypes of the violent black youth. Meanwhile, he saw himself as a deeply ethical person who was firmly against crime, and who had lost several friends because of it. One of these was Rocky, a Mapantsula dancern and a rising star who had joined a dance company at Rhodes University and was friends with all the hip-hop artists. At the beginning of this study he was stabbed and killed shortly after a TV performance by someone who knew him, and his friends

suspected it was because of jealousy (Words, personal communication, 6 February 2014). As Ratele (2010) shows, it was not whites, but young black men who were the most likely of all South Africans to be victims of homicides, mostly by people they knew, often other young black men. He attributes this to the desperation to retain some kind of masculine status in an environment where there are no models to claim such status except through violence.

The high risks of provoking anger and violence meant that even those who disagreed with violent expressions of masculinity often had to take on its embodied dispositions to survive. Azlan had moved to Grahamstown a few years ago when he got a job here in stock taking, and lived in one of the airbrick rooms in his aunt's yard next door to his uncle who was a TB patient. They lived across the road from the school and his aunt survived from selling ice lollies and popcorn to the children during break. Azlan, a reserved but determined music producer who was small in stature and sported hair in trendy "corn rows", had grown up in the nearby city of Port Elizabeth. He explained that he was one of the few boys in his school who had taken his studies seriously, which meant that he spent a lot of time studying with girls (Personal communication, 6 March 2014). He was often verbally abused by other boys because of this, who called him a gay and a sissy. Being a boy, to be truly manly in the township, meant one had to skip classes and walk around in the streets with other boys during class time, or one had to smoke at the back of the school toilets, Azlan explained. Every one of his male peers who took his studies seriously and who performed moderately well was targeted by the gangs, who assumed that you "knew nothing about the streets". If one encountered these gangs, Azlan explained, you had to act fearlessly and demonstrate that you knew how to talk a certain language, "street language". If you didn't, and you started shaking with fear, you would be robbed of everything you had. Azlan was proud that he was able to keep on chatting and stand firm in the face of such threats. Others who could not hide their terror had to stay at home all the time with their parents and could not be on the streets at all. In this way Azlan symbolically demonstrated that he belonged in this environment where violence was normal, and had a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). Azlan's story illustrates the difficulty of challenging the hegemonic masculinity in this space, and how it involved a great amount of self-control not to become involved in triggering the insecurities of others.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how hip-hop artists in Grahamstown's townships face not only material deprivation, but profound attacks on their sense of self, through the "symbolic violence" that justifies extreme inequality in South Africa. Such symbolic violence associates greater worth to the dominant by sanctifying the cultural and social capital they hold, while positioning the dominated as worthless. Hip-hop can thus be understood as a project to reclaim dignity, and to attribute worth to the cultural and social capital of township communities. This chapter's contribution is thus to show how digital hip-hop practices are embedded within such a search for dignity, which explains the extreme dedication they exhibit in learning and mastering digital media.

This chapter's findings on how hip-hop artists are driven by dreams of social mobility will be shown in future chapters to be another key driving force for acquiring digital skills. This is because hip-hop artists consider their gradual acquisition of hip-hop skills, particularly digital skills, in some ways equivalent to social mobility, since it serves as a measure with which to quantify their progress in society. In this way the cultural capital acquired in hip-hop is equivocated with the cultural capital for entrepreneurship and employment in general. Hip-hop artists are aware of how the cultural capital of the township, in terms of the lack of value attributed to African languages and African culture and black culture in general, is dismissed in South African society as worthless. In the next chapter, their efforts to give value to the isiXhosa language and culture, and the resilience of poor people in the face of structural and symbolic violence, will be demonstrated.

This chapter has shown how hip-hop artists see the violent masculinity that is hegemonic in the township as a weakness brought on by a lack of "consciousness". In subsequent chapters, hip-hop artists' attempts to craft a new form of masculinity in terms of their intellectual, artistic, professional and entrepreneurial abilities will be foregrounded. The learning and mastery of digital media skills will be shown to be integral to such notions of masculine ability. Such a focus on redefining masculinity will also be shown to hamper hip-hop's possibilities for addressing other forms of gender struggles, such as enabling young women and their technical skills development.

Hip-hop artists are particularly critical of the "haters" or gossipers who make disparaging remarks to those in the township who are committed to their own social mobility, such as hip-hop artists. They understand such gossipers are driven by self-hate, a self-hate informed by internalising their own oppression that can only be overcome by adopting the

principles of black self-love as articulated in the philosophy of black consciousness. In future chapters, they will be shown to define hip-hop as the opposite of gossip, as enabling instead of disabling, offering others advice for overcoming difficulties and progressing in society. Thus hip-hop is conceptualised as not only offering a personal way out of the despair of township life, but also as making a contribution towards social change. In future chapters, the importance of social solidarity and communal understandings of the self will be highlighted. Such communal solidarity therefore provides another motivation for these young people to become involved in hip-hop, and further explains their dedication to mastering its practices, including its digital practices.

Chapter Four: Hip-hop and the remixing of the self

This chapter's contribution is to show how hip-hop artists try and establish a sense of self-worth for themselves and their community through various methods. Firstly, they claim a role for themselves as “uplifters” of their community. Like hip-hop artists elsewhere (Forman, 2004c), Grahamstown hip-hop artists drew their strength in the face of devaluing symbolic violence in a sense of shared solidarity with others. Forman (2004c) describes how US hip-hop artists draw their authority from the collective space of their immediate neighbourhood. Hip-hop artists in this study were explicit about their communal responsibilities rooted in their traditional Xhosa culture and their position as “older brothers”. Hip-hop practices were conceptualised as part of communal obligations to share advice and in recognising the humanity of others. We may conceptualise such communal identity in terms of African personhood (Gyekye, 1998), a sense of the self that encourages moral individual agency and puts a high premium on face-to-face relationships, defining a person's humanity and personal value as situated in relations with others. Therefore, practices that enable and strengthen such relationships were particularly meaningful for these young people in developing a sense of value, and so acting as a bulwark against symbolic violence. The hip-hop artists situated their own personal advancement as tied in with their community's advancement. They were “moving forward” by not leaving others “behind”. Furthermore, by conceptualising their masculinity in terms of communal care and responsibility for others, informed by Xhosa traditions, male hip-hop artists were able to resist the violent masculinity that had developed in the township.

Secondly, this chapter shows how hip-hop artists tried to counter symbolic violence through attributing worth to the cultural capital of people in the township. They used hip-hop to celebrate African culture and the isiXhosa language, as well as the resilience of poor people.

Thirdly, hip-hop allowed these young people to claim identities associated with worth, identities of personal brilliance often denied to the black poor subject: that of the intellectual, artist and innovator, which was enacted through hip-hop performances and digital practices. Like others who situated their sense of self in an African personhood (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001), hip-hop artists in Grahamstown were creatively combining a communal African sense of self with other more individualistic “modern” notions of identity. In claiming such capable individualistic identities, hip-hop artists often invoked the concept of professionalism. They often discussed their technical skills in relation to such

professionalism, in which they not only meant that they were knowledgeable, meticulous in their attention to detail and experienced, but also that they situated their hip-hop skills in relation to marketable skills in the economy, thus signifying their employability and potential for social mobility. Professionalism is an ideology that promotes capitalist interests but masks these by presenting a knowledgeable and caring competence to the world (Fournier, 1999; Larson, 1977). While the hip-hop artists may be considered to promote such capitalist interests through adopting the term, they have also wrenched it from its exclusive appropriation by the middle classes and co-opted it for their own purposes. They similarly co-opted entrepreneurship, defining themselves through it despite the fact that many of them did not engage in any economic transactions. Such co-option and redefining or “remixing” of terms from the commercial world to reconceptualise the self is a major theme that emerges from this study.

Conceptualising the self in terms of enterprise, could be considered a hyper-individualised notion of self, promoted by neoliberal discourses (N. Rose, 1990). Modernist notions of the individual still assume some form of collective identity in the self as a rights-bearing citizen sharing a collective fate with others in the nation-state, while such neoliberal notions of the self as enterprise are devoid of such public sentiment and situate it in constant competition with others (Makovicky, 2014; Martin, 2000; N. Rose, 1990). The notion of the self as enterprise here offered the hip-hop artists a way to conceptualise themselves as having resourcefulness and agency. Neoliberal ideology displaces modernist notions of shared agency situated in exchanges between capital and labour, dismissing labour’s agency and portraying it as a passive resource to be manipulated, and instead projects the entrepreneur as the only one in society considered to have any agency and worth (Read, 2009). In claiming the identity of the entrepreneur, hip-hop artists therefore both legitimised these neoliberal discourses and were also co-opting and transforming them for their own purposes. Hip-hop artists were therefore able to construct a sense of worth for themselves, by remixing meanings and identities from a variety of discourses and traditions. A key contribution of this study is to show how hip-hop artists construct a sense of self-worth through combining and redefining valued identities located in seemingly contradictory discourses of both critical opposition as well as hegemonic discourses located in the commercial world.

4.1 Hip-hop and defining the self through others

For these young people, hip-hop enabled possibilities for doing things, and was, the hip-hop artists stressed, uplifting, not as they explained, “downlifting”, like gossip. They challenged the hegemonic violent masculinity that had developed in the township through reimagining a caring traditional masculinity, demonstrating the potential of tradition in terms of reconceptualising gender (Ratele, 2014). The hip-hop artists understood their role as that of older brothers, who were morally obliged to offer their advice and experience to the “younger brothers” of the community. The younger men, they believed, could learn from their mistakes, or as Suffocate put it: “We’ve been there, we got the T-shirt”. This role of the older brother was conceptualised in terms of traditional Xhosa morality, and my participants explained that being a Xhosa man was all about caring, not only caring for those in your extended family who needed financial and material support, but also caring for your community through offering moral guidance. While Western masculinity emphasised individuality and independence and being able to do what you wanted, African masculinity was expressed through showing responsibility in supporting others (Krige, 2015). The hip-hop artists were thus finding a way to redefine their worth and humanity by resisting the internalisation of the “dominant Other”, who judges them as lacking, through their relationship in supporting others in their own community in a process of solidarity. The “dominant Other” was thus replaced by an “equal other” who invoked a sense of worth, not judgement. This sense of worth through community is indeed the premise of the African value of ubuntu, which defines the worth of the self through moral relation with others in a supportive relationship modelled on the ideal family (Metz & Gaie, 2010). One of the premises of black consciousness is that solidarity with each other is the best way to confront the hopelessness and dehumanisation that is produced by internalising racism.

Now this sense of defeat is basically what we are fighting against; people must not just give in to the hardship of life, people must develop a hope, people must develop some form of security to be together to look at their problems, and people must in this way build up their humanity (Biko, 1978, p. 114).

This meant one needed to care enough about things that were wrong in your community to try and change them, through talking to people and bringing people together. The concept of personhood originates in anthropology and seeks to explain how notions of self are linked to ideas of kinship, property and the self as a moral being in relation to others (Carsten, 2004). African personhood as a concept has developed from its early essentialist

notions to embrace more nuanced constructions of self. Menkiti (1984) used linguistic and cultural history to define African personhood as profoundly in opposition to a rights-based Western individualism and argued that it was instead rooted in absolute communal obligation, where full personhood was only gradually achieved through developing social relations with others, and was not an automatic right. Gyekye (1998) critiques such dualism and argues that African personhood is more complex, combining notions of communalism and individualism. He describes how Africans are judged as individuals in terms of their moral relations to others or their usefulness to society, and thus refutes Menkiti's essentialist statements that African personhood is solely defined in communal terms. He shows how individual agency is recognised in personal choices and the individual right to dignity, property and self-care and the seeking out of appropriate social status (Gyekye, 1998).

Comaroff and Comaroff (2001, p. 269) describe the particular notions of personhood of the Batswana in the colonial era to show how African personhood may incorporate an individualism rooted in communalism since it values individual ability to mobilise communal obligation by developing social networks or "wealth in people". African personhood is thus here a process of becoming a social person through building such relations, and recognises individual agency even though it may not enshrine absolute individualistic rights and claims to property cut off from communal obligation, colonial values which were considered perverse in Batswana society (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001). The Comaroffs (2001) caution that African personhood should never be considered a fixed universal concept but needs to be contextually explored and may be creatively constituted as people construct hybrid notions of self, incorporating other more Western concepts of personhood such as the bourgeois civility embraced by the colonial black elite.

It is due to such communal values of obligation towards others that the hip-hop artists distanced themselves explicitly from gangster rap. Blaqseed, a visiting hip-hop artist from Port Elizabeth who attended one of my workshops, expressed this powerfully:

Blaqseed: The American hip-hop ne, it's like it's for people who don't care about anything. How do you live, or how do you do things – you can do anything! Now from our hip-hop it's like we have lots of things to respect you see, as we produce our music, we give advices, you see (Personal communication, 4 July 2013).

Blaqseed was mobilising one of the bases of traditional Xhosa culture, the notion of respect, which implies not only the recognition of a person's humanity, but also hierarchies of age, where older people were valued for their vast experience in navigating communal life and moral challenges. In the track *Where I'm From*, Macabre raps about hip-hop artists, the "pillars of the community" who "walk the narrow path" to bring the "bitter medicine of the gall bladder" to the younger brothers who are "jailbirds". Here he is not only drawing on the religious metaphor of the narrow path to explain their role as moral leaders who sacrifice self for the greater good, but also on African notions of healing, which, like Chinese medicine, is conceptualised around blockages that need to be purged for healing to occur (Erickson, 2007). Their messages may be bitter and unpleasant, but are what is needed for healing. Such messages or "advices" draw on their daily experiences of hardship, and the stories of others in their community.

*Siphum'elokishini embindini wesixeko
werhontshini iFingo kwintsika ye-hip-hop
yaseRhni.
Ubom bumaxongo kubulawana ngethongo
ngokuthembela nangabaninawa nabo
ngonotrongo.
Ulife ongenasongo undinukisela okwe
sabhongo ndisinelwa ngumntu*

endingamaziyo as if bendiqatyw'umzondo.

*Inyani ikrakra ngaphakathi oko
gqatshukelwe yinyongo, kuisinyikinyiki
ekasi sivul'indlela ngalo mkhondo.*

We're coming from the township on a narrow path, from the heart of the city - Fingo is the pillar of Rhini hip-hop. Life is hard, they kill each other because of dreams; we can't rely on our younger brothers because they are the jailbirds. We are living a purposeless life that stinks like a burp, then a stranger looks at me with a smirk, as if I am smeared with the umzondo beetle [a strong smelling insect]. Truth is bitter from the inside, as if the gallbladder has burst, the township is crowded and we open a way.

We may consider this sense of purpose, meaning and agency through helping others that hip-hop cultivated in young people as having as important an impact on their lives as other more material initiatives might do. Amartya Sen (1992; 1999) critiqued a Westernised model of development that relied solely on economic indicators that were heavily influenced by modernist ideas of progress dating back to the mid-twentieth century (see Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964). These outdated development models conflated Westernisation with development, and allowed very little agency for people in developing countries to create their own particular form of modernity (Ojo, 2004). In contrast Sen (1992; 1999) emphasised that people's ability to have choices in life, and to choose lives which they valued, which he terms

“capability”, is a better indicator of development as it included meaning and agency in this definition.

4.2 Conscious hip-hop and solidarity with the neighbourhood

Macleod (2009, p. 143) argues that the phrase “keeping it real” in hip-hop that emerged in the USA is used to show that one is not disassociating oneself from the neighbourhood in which one grew up, and that one was continuing to primarily address one’s own community, instead of pandering to a commercial audience. There was thus some cultural synergy between global hip-hop and the concepts of African personhood in this value placed on identifying the self through the community, which may be expected as the cultural values of hip-hop are rooted in African-American culture (Schloss, 2004). For the Grahamstown hip-hop artists, the hip-hop slogan “keeping it real” (MacLeod, 2009, p. 143) was directly linked to their responsibility to offer others in the community advice based on real-life experiences, not just bragging about fantasy lifestyles. This was thus an issue of empiricism, and they became particularly upset when South African township rappers performed tracks boasting about their material possessions and their many girlfriends, when they knew this was a fantasy, and that they faced the same desperate circumstances. It was for this reason that many of them called their style of hip-hop “truth music” and situated themselves within the “conscious” hip-hop movement.

Haupt (2008, pp. 147–148) describes how hip-hop can essentially be broken down into two traditions: conscious hip-hop and commercial “gangsta” hip-hop. The “conscious” tradition focuses on awareness of domination and reflection, informed by black consciousness, on one’s own position or “knowledge of self”. In contrast, the commercial “gangsta” tradition does not attempt to challenge domination, but celebrates misogyny, drugs, male sexual prowess and personal enrichment (Haupt, 2008, p. 148). Such “gangsta” hip-hop did not offer any advice or solutions, but was driven by rage, nihilism and commercial gain (Quinn, 2005). Gangsta hip-hop therefore seemed to emulate the “habitus of the ‘hood” (Richardson & Skott-Myhre, 2012) in which the violence, misogyny and nihilism produced under conditions of oppression were, as Bourdieu (1990) argues, misrecognised and redefined as badges of dignity. Established hip-hop artists had to educate newcomers in the “conscious” tradition, as they may often associate the norms of the “gangsta” tradition with hip-hop since it dominated commercial distribution channels. At one of the cyphers in Grahamstown, a new rapper had started to rap about the many cars he owned, and the others

had confronted him about this, asking him to show them these cars and, if he did not have any, to stop rapping about this. Nevertheless, even if one had money or cars, for them there was no real point in rapping about these, Azlan said, if they were not going to help other people. Thus, highlighting aspects of ordinary life and submitting them to reflexive examination was considered a way of offering others some material to reflect on in order to take back agency and control over their own lives.

Giddens (1984, p. 4) argues that through reflecting on everyday habitual subconscious actions, or what he calls “practical actions”, and bringing them into a space of discussion or “discursive action” (Giddens, 1984, p. 6) may enable one’s agency to change social conditions. Indeed, the black consciousness philosophy that local hip-hop heads subscribe to similarly recognises that change requires a process where oppressed people reflect on and find solutions to their own problems (Biko, 1978, p. 114). Conscious hip-hop has adopted this process of “knowledge of self” to become aware of internal discourses of oppression, particularly those associated with race (Pieterse, 2010). The hip-hop tracks based on the empirical observation of everyday township life may thus be conceptualised as a form of reflexivity which allows the artists to fashion a new subjectivity. Here authenticity was not only expressed in representing reality factually, but also in sharing the emotional reality of hardship, and thus provoking an affective response and a connection with others.¹⁸ For Oz, Eastern Cape hip-hop was particularly valuable because it shared such “real” stories, and “real” emotional experiences.

Oz: Like, where you actually sit down and where you’re actually: “Like brother man, you were hurt, wow, bro. It’s okay, it’s okay”
(Personal communication, 13 May 2014).

Here we see a more vulnerable masculinity develop, countering the “cool pose” (Jeffries, 2011, pp. 56–58) of a violent gangsta hip-hop masculinity where trauma is covered up and denied or only expressed through more violence. Oz promoted hip-hop artists in Grahamstown and other Eastern Cape towns through his blog, and organised performances for them with local student audiences. He confessed that he struggled to make sense of South African white rappers and their emulation of black styles. He could just not comprehend their

¹⁸ The US rapper, writer and actor Saul Williams offers advice to other rappers in his track *Lalala*, “Why not rhyme about what you’re feeling, or not be felt”, thus calling on emcees to express themselves emotionally in order to create an affective response, illustrating the importance of the affective in hip-hop.

motivations because, in terms of his understanding of hip-hop as a genre, it required telling “real stories” and focusing on overcoming personal hardship and difficulties one had actually experienced, or at least had happened to people you knew and cared about. This did not mean that he thought white people should not rap, but instead that they should rap about their actual experiences, instead of borrowing black experiences.

Various scholars have noted how “conscious” hip-hop may enable agency on an individual and communal scale by challenging racism and reclaiming stigmatised spaces (Haupt, 2008; Mitchell, 2001; Pieterse, 2010; Watkins, 2005). Malone and Martinez (2015) argue that hip-hop’s unique culture is ideal for mobilising people around social causes because it combines a grassroots focus on local issues with a globalised appeal that transcends borders and cultures. Hip-hop’s specificity enables artists to focus on local issues and narratives, and allows these hip-hop artists to identify with communal issues (Perry, 2004, cited in Pieterse, 2010). Hip-hop’s particular focus on everyday life along with its musical, linguistic and corporal tools enables social reflection and the ability to claim a positive identity (Tickner, 2008, cited in Malone & Martinez, 2015). The genre is open to great diversity in terms of lyrical content, allowing artists to create songs that juxtapose “sex alongside spirituality, depravity alongside beauty”, and also tolerates contradictory messages, so that it can be described as an “open discourse” which promotes a dialogical space where artists can respond to each other’s ideas (Perry, 2004, cited in Pieterse, 2010, p. 437). Hip-hop thus allows young people capacity for voice, or the ability to give an account of themselves (Couldry, 2010).

For these artists, hip-hop was about promoting a community conversation about their shared hardship, and validating their everyday struggles. It was not only about giving voice to their own experiences, but also about representing the voices of others and listening to the community. Communities do not just need a voice, they also need others to listen for their voice to count (Dreher, 2009). Zion Eyes explained that listening to other people talk about their problems was an essential part of composing his songs. In “Bubomi bam” (“This is my life”) he wanted to make explicit the hardships of living in poverty and give poor people “their dignity back”, sharing their inner lives and the stories of what they had struggled with and overcome. He collated a number of other people’s stories into this song. It included stories of running out of food the week before pension day, mothers being robbed of the

stokvel¹⁹ money, suddenly finding oneself part of a criminal gang, being addicted to alcohol, and being the target of gossip. It also included stories of old people being confused about how the world has not actually changed in post-apartheid society. Zion Eyes emphasised one line in the track, *Ubomi bakhe buphezu kwezinto ezophukayo* (His life balancing high above the ground on a pane of shattering glass), as illustrating what it felt like living in a constant sense of inevitable tragedy, where one was trying to maintain your faith in life while its foundation seemed to be shattering under your feet.

<i>Ndikhangeleka njengomntana</i>	I look like a dying child, who is being
<i>Ofayo, ongasafunwayo</i>	rejected
<i>Ubomi bakhe buphezu kwento ezophukayo</i>	His life balancing high above the ground on
	a pane of shattering glass
<i>Uhanjwa zimpukane kunzima nokuyisusa</i>	Flies are running on his face and he can't
<i>Yindla</i>	even wipe them off
<i>Abantu badlulakuwe bakujongela phantsi</i>	Because of hunger and poverty, people pass
	one by and look down on one
<i>Inyembezi zivela ziziwele phantsi</i>	Tears they just spill from the eyes

Zion Eyes attributed all these stories to himself, in an autobiographical manner, as a way of avoiding others judging the people who were the sources of these stories. As the song is primarily an attack on the devaluing culture of “gossiping”, Zion wanted no one to feel judged by it, but instead to feel valued through having their story told and worthy of being in song. He saw himself as a healer of community wounds, taking on the pain and judgement given to others. Listening here is therefore not just a practice of shifting to the emic perspective, but also a “practice of recognition” (Honneth, 1996, cited in Dreher, 2009) where the notion of the inherent value of the other person, the value of their ideas, struggles and emotions, is integral to the listening process. In hip-hop “representing the ‘hood” refers to creating a broader profile for the home territory (Forman, 2004c, p. 208). Zion Eyes’ process of composing a song shows how he does this in a way that not only promotes his township neighbourhood, but is focused on recognising the people who live there, their humanity and their struggles, and portraying it to the world. This example shows how a song and the process of composition may actively challenge symbolic power, and the culture of “gossiping” which disciplines people here to constrain their sense of agency.

¹⁹ A stokvel is a shared saving scheme where women take turns to pool the lump sum for large purchases.

Zion Eyes: It's something that people are facing – the majority of people are facing every day. It's just that there's no voice to speak about those things... So I decided to take a responsibility to share those kinds of experiences to the world. So it's that thing – when you start to speak, it's the first step to a healing process (Personal communication, 15 August 2014).

Hip-hop lyrics were therefore a shared history of struggles that were often tied to a place. It was about resisting the “territorial stigmatization” or “blemish of place” (Wacquant, 2007) imposed on poor neighbourhoods, and claiming their communal stories of survival. Retaliation and Nova considered their crew's hip-hop to be a way of sharing the humanity of people who lived in their neighbourhood, Hooggenoeg, a poor area where “coloured” and Xhosa people live side by side, and which was not only scorned by those in relatively more affluent “coloured townships”, but also by those in Xhosa townships who considered it overrun with “coloured knife stabbers”.

Hip-hop artists, while they distanced themselves from criminal activity, also tried to adopt an emic perspective and to understand how criminals ended up that way. Azlan composed a track to allow listeners to also feel pity for the criminal, and to start to understand his reasons, while also empathising with the criminal's parents, and to worry with them how they could support their child to change and to get out of an endless cycle of returning to prison. He wanted people to listen to the track and consider how this criminal could be helped so that he could be, as Azlan told me, “a normal person, like me and you”. Azlan had spoken to many gangsters in the streets, and had never experienced any coercion to join these gangs. Instead, they often encouraged him to stay in school, since he still had options open for his future. Being a criminal, here, was like giving in to circumstances, while those who resisted it often claimed it was sheer determination and willpower that was helping them hang onto belief in themselves and their eventual success.

Azlan's composing of “truth lyrics” was therefore a practice of empathy, where the artist suspended judgement and tried to experience the world from the point of view of the other. It was about suspending the judgemental moral categories that circulated in the community, particularly among those who saw others as “useless”. Instead of seeing the world as the outcome of a struggle between superior and inferior individuals, these hip-hop artists recognised the importance of social circumstances and misfortunes and how this could change the options available to a person overnight. They wanted these criminals to distance themselves from the nihilistic psychic space they inhabited, and to believe that they could change. This empathy with others was a way of expressing solidarity with those they grew up

with, demonstrating that they were not prejudging them and condemning them to failure, like they perceived broader society had indeed done.

The hip-hop artists were particularly scornful of politicians, who only arrived near election time and then made a series of promises which they did not keep, adopting superior airs. Dezz explained that their group did not rap about politics, as they did not want to appear to be “the ones, the acknowledged ones, or the illuminated ones”. Party politics seemed at odds with the values of hip-hop here, as politicians were not interested in “keeping it real” because they did not describe the people’s day-to-day struggles as they were, but instead seemed to want to just point out their own successes. They were also not “representing the ‘hood” – they were only coming to listen to people when they needed votes, not when people needed them. However, hip-hop artists, particularly the older ones like XNasty, were also sceptical of the merits of political protests and confrontations with government. It was easy to manipulate people who had lost a sense of their own value towards anger and destruction, he said, easy to fan rumours and to look for scapegoats. What was harder was to inspire people to start their own initiatives, not to rely on government, nor spend their efforts only protesting against government, but instead to also create their own projects for transforming their communities.

4.3 Hip-hop and championing African and township culture

Part of valuing the community they came from was rediscovering the value in African culture. Many of the Grahamstown hip-hop artists were inspired by conscious hip-hop from the USA, such as *KRS1*, *Public Enemy* and *The Fugees*. However, while they considered themselves to be part of that movement, they, like other South African hip-hop artists (Becker & Dastile, 2008; Gilmer, 2007), understood hip-hop to ultimately be rooted in older African traditions. Like hip-hop artists elsewhere in South Africa (Pritchard, 2011, p. 251), they saw their appropriation of hip-hop as “taking back” an African musical form that had been “spiced up” in America, but had also lost some of its African character through the history of slavery. It was not right for them as African artists just to “do what America is doing”, Azlan explained, while they forgot their own roots. They had a responsibility to re-Africanise hip-hop. Local hip-hop artists started to imagine the elements of hip-hop in terms of their own Xhosa traditions, and visualised the MC as the traditional isiXhosa imbongi, “praise singer”, the deejay as the drummers who accompanied him, and the break-dancers as acrobatic

African dancers. “Coloured” hip-hop artists such as Nova referred to the Khoisan rock art, and how this could be seen as a precursor to graffiti.²⁰

It is for this reason that Grahamstown hip-hop heads were not particularly concerned about replicating specific genre features of global hip-hop. Instead of mimicking the poses and gestures of international hip-hop artists, local artists like the bright-eyed teenager Ako and tall and gangly “joker” Njilo incorporated the gestures and voice patterns of traditional Xhosa imbongi poets, or praise singers, into their rapping. The two were both part of Dezz’s group Imin’esidenge, and were proud of their team’s Africanised uniform: blue overalls decorated with bright yellow and orange cloth squares and red beaded trimming sewn up by a team of aunts. In terms of clothing, hip-hop artists would commonly wear traditional African clothing in their performances, or incorporate a traditional instrument like the mbira. In Africanising hip-hop, they were not merely localising it, but affirming the value of local customs and a pan-African identity. The general intellectual disposition was also extended to a mastery of the isiXhosa language, so validating and celebrating its speakers and their rich heritage. Hip-hop lyrics contained complex references to very particular cultural practices, so celebrating the richness of Xhosa culture. Through working closely with IThala Lenyani, as he assisted me with the translations of songs, he would point out many lines in various hip-hop tracks that referred to traditional rituals, sayings and concepts of healing. Such references to an alternative traditional world where young black men are valued provides an alternative “value regime” (Skeggs, 2011) where the hip-hop artist may escape the devaluation they are subject to in neoliberal South African society. Hip-hop artists were responding to Steve Biko’s (1978) call to rediscover African history, languages and culture. This celebration of tradition did not, however, mean that hip-hop artists did not see themselves as thoroughly modern. Dezz and his group, however much they despaired against the violence and drunkenness of the modern township and valorised rural traditional life, were adamant they had no intention of returning to it. They were instead embracing an Africanised modernity in their love of technology, their recognition of contemporary gender relations and their belief in the power of education. One may indeed recognise the existence of African modernity across the continent, which combined the traditional with the “exogenous” to create a society based on collective success (Nyamnjoh, 1996).

²⁰ A similar claim is made in the documentary “Afrikaaps”.

4.4 Hip-hop, remixing and reinventing the self

The African concept of personhood and the self is not dogmatic or static but, in keeping with its dynamic conceptualisation of a person's ability to craft their own "becoming" through associations with others, it has embraced "transcultural discourses of selfhood" where Africans at various points in time have also combined more Westernised individualised notions of the self with communal identities (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, pp. 277–278). In Grahamstown hip-hop, such individual notions of the self were expressed in three ways: the concept of the self as intellectual, artist and enterprise. One may consider the notion of the self as intellectual and artist as rooted in the enlightenment concept of the individual as being the owner of a unique body and mind which enabled a number of unique abilities (Strathern, 1996).

Hip-hop in Grahamstown may be considered as providing a way of asserting an intellectual identity in the face of devaluing discourses that particularly associated blackness with physicality, sexuality and violence, not the intellect (McClintock, 1995). It is this attribute of intelligence which has historically been denied to black subjects since colonial times (McClintock, 1995, p. 241), and which has resulted in frequent attempts by black men to prove their intellect (Fanon, 2008/1952, p. 12). Many of the participants shared how hip-hop culture played an important part in exposing them to reading and debating the ideas they had encountered in books. A few years ago, Grahamstown's oldest hip-hop organisation, the Fingo Revolutionaries, headed up by XNasty, had been very active in running workshops where they used hip-hop to promote reading in schools. Hip-hop artists competed in wielding complex English terminology, and those who did not were berated by the others saying that they did not belong in hip-hop if they did not read. A hip-hop artist had to have a library card. Artists would take out books from the library, share them with others and get together to discuss them in their rooms. They read books about the South African apartheid era, about Steve Biko, and about history. They consulted dictionaries in great detail to scour them for terminology for their lyrics. Reading transformed their lives. Rappers Main Event and Zion Eyes, for example, started visiting the library on a regular basis in high school and improved their English so dramatically that their school marks suddenly escalated and they were surprised at how other learners clustered around them for help with their homework. This intellectual culture is spoken about nostalgically as a particular moment in Grahamstown hip-hop that has waned, perhaps to do with the fact that the local arts council no longer funds the

Fingo Revolutionaries to run such workshops, or perhaps with the shift away from English towards rapping in isiXhosa.

Hip-hop artists mostly thought of themselves as “artists” first before they were “hip-hop artists”, which meant that they were often experimenting with new creative forms, moving easily between creating music, performing poetry, writing drama scripts or designing fashion. In aligning themselves with the professional music industry, hip-hop artists would very often describe themselves as professional, particularly when trying to distinguish themselves from other hip-hop artists who were not as skilled. The “ideology of profession” (Larson, 1977, p. 220) presents professionalism as informed by objective standards of specialised knowledge and service to society, and suggests that membership is not based on class, but on innate ability. Larson (1977) argues that professionalism is an ideology which masks its close relationship to capitalism, where professions like medicine, law and engineering controlled the education and socialisation of new professionals into accepting capitalist mores, and particularly legitimised monopoly capitalism based on notions of scientific “professional” management. In the neoliberal era, the term “professionalism” has been extended beyond the recognised professions such as law and engineering to apply to informal workplaces such as fast-food service, to signify a worker’s appropriate identity in relation to customers (Fournier, 1999). Fournier (1999, p. 282) argues that the label of professionalism has become a disciplinary mechanism in the workplace that acts to control workers by linking behaviour that promotes profits to the “articulation of competence”. One may argue that hip-hop artists appropriate the term “professional” to assert their own competence despite their lack of qualifications or employment. However, in some ways this appropriation inserts them into a capitalistic discourse.

Grahamstown hip-hop culture also understood being an artist as being an entrepreneur. In claiming this creative, innovative identity, hip-hop artists were both challenging and co-opting neoliberal discourses that situate the sole source of agency and innovation in the entrepreneur (Read, 2009). It is important to recognise hip-hop as a product of neoliberalism, which has always been both part of neoliberalism while also resistant to its discourses that situated the market as the only legitimate power. Hip-hop developed as a way of coping with the de-industrialisation that crippled poor black neighbourhoods in the USA in the 1970s and 80s (Jeffries, 2011, p. 1). In these neighbourhoods where hip-hop originated, its fans and artists were “hustling” and inventing new cultures to come to terms with structural adjustments and the disappearance of working-class jobs (Gosa, 2015). The new, affordable media technologies, which made hip-hop music possible, were also goods of the

global multinationals that were shaping this neoliberal order (Gosa, 2015). The commercial recording industry packaged the raw energy of the streets into hip-hop as a product (Jeffries, 2011, p. 1). Profit motives increasingly pushed the stereotype of the black sex-starved gangster character to dominate commercial hip-hop, to satisfy the appetites of thrill-seeking white fans (Watkins, 2005, pp. 95, 97). Hip-hop thus encapsulated various contradictions in how it had responded to neoliberalism, as both resisting it, while operating within it.

Rose (1990) argues that neoliberalism promotes a particular sense of the self as an “enterprise”. Capitalism has, since the enlightenment, developed an individualised notion of the person as the owner of a body and hence also the owner of that body’s labour and ideas, thus enabling the individual to trade these entities (Strathern, 1996). In the exploitative relationship between capital and labour, however, various collective obligations were nevertheless negotiated through worker struggles, such as the working week, long-term employment, and various rights in the workplace, such as training (Casey, 2002). With the decline of the nation-state and the rise of the market, considering the individual worker as a citizen has lost ground and people are increasingly viewing themselves as “mini-corporations” (Martin, 2000, p. 514). In these discourses, entrepreneurship and enterprise are not only associated with business, but have become a way to describe the self in terms of “initiative, action, and agency” (Makovicky, 2014, p. 26). This means people increasingly see themselves as a “collection of assets that one must continually invest in, nurture, manage and develop” (Martin, 2000, p. 514). In this way the exploitation in the labour relation is masked and a sense of equality with the corporation is posited, where each worker becomes just another enterprise, competing with other enterprises.

Grahamstown hip-hop artists were very conscious of themselves as a “brand”, “trademark” and “style”, and they were thus taking on board this notion of neoliberal personhood defined in the self as enterprise. In confidently attributing the label of “entrepreneur” to themselves, despite the fact that there was generally very little money that was exchanged in Grahamstown hip-hop, they were challenging neoliberal discourses that only associate wealthy company owners with innovation (Read, 2009). Instead, in claiming this identity, they were redefining entrepreneurship and the prestige associated with it to also include survivalist micro-businesses, or just having an attitude to future success. In this way the definition of the entrepreneur was extended to include people who live precarious lives. Thus hip-hop in Grahamstown, as in the rest of the world, was also a cultural form that had developed inside neoliberalism, and was trying to adapt to its contradictions (Jeffries, 2011), crafting their own sense of identity and self-worth out of a collection on offer. The

Grahamstown hip-hop artists were generally much more confident in their belief in the effectiveness of entrepreneurship to transform society than political rhetoric.

Oz: Promises don't really come true when people just talk. Like if you do something about it that's when you change. Cos the whole point of an entrepreneur is to be somebody who wants solutions for people...as far as activism goes [makes fist salute and shakes head]...I'm not that kind of kid (Personal communication, 13 May 2014).

Many of the hip-hop artists had set up small companies comprising their crew as directors, or had created small NGOs. They told me that they met regularly and had business plans, goals and vision statements. While the artists based in town and their companies, Fingo Festival and Blahzeblah, indeed had regular projects and funding, those based in the township seemed more survivalist. For these artists, having a small company or NGO often seemed more of a statement of hope than a currently productive organisation. One artist, for example, was very keen to tell me about his organisation, their future projects, the offices and photocopying machines they were going to have once his funding proposals were approved, but he explained that he had yet to decide whether it would be a company or an NGO, and his dreams were thus far from reality. Nevertheless, he was confident that if he persevered he would eventually get funding and run the various storytelling and poetry projects he had set his mind to. For these young people, the discourse of progress and development were very much part of their life stories. They believed in the promise of meritocracy, the South African dream that hard work would pay off. IThala Lenyani scoffed at people who simply fantasised about being billionaires without “moving their feet”. If you did, he pronounced, “You will be a billionaire in a few years”. When progress did not happen, what was needed was to try harder. Like the young people in Swartz's (2009) study of teenagers in the township of Langa, who were caught up in the meritocratic “American dream”, they were setting such high aspirations for themselves that this made success a nearly impossible feat under these structural conditions. It raised questions to what extent they would be able to sustain their current optimism and way of life, before also being swept aside by nihilism. While they challenged symbolic power by denying that poor people were “worthless”, they in some ways also thus bought into meritocratic discourses which rendered invisible how unequal access to resources ensured the replication of the class structure.

Several artists were indeed getting somewhere, and were able to make some money selling designs or running projects, but the vast majority were not engaged in economic

activity, even though their creative activities kept them busy. They had done what they understood to be their side of the social bargain: stayed in school, engaged in a moral “narrow” path, worked hard to improve their skills and market themselves, but they were seeing very little pay-off for their efforts. With school results that offered very little options, no money to set up businesses or go to trade schools, they were essentially stuck and, despite the sophisticated digital skills many were able to develop, there was no way to formalise or validate these. The determination of these hip-hop artists to acquire such digital skills through dedicating many hours of practice and constant struggles with equipment, is arguably directly related to their need to validate their communities and their own abilities in the face of the rest of society branding them as “useless”. I have tried in this chapter, to show how these hip-hop artists are doing all they can to be agents for their own futures and the future of their communities.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how hip-hop artists claim back their own and their community’s dignity without adopting the “habitus of the ‘hood” (Richardson & Skott-Myhre, 2012). They do so by focusing on their responsibility to others, and find new value in themselves through adopting this communal role, which is arguably related to the importance of notions of African personhood (Gyekye, 1998) in the townships of Grahamstown. Within this communal sense of self, hip-hop artists embrace the black consciousness philosophy and promote a reflective appreciation of hip-hop lyrics. They champion traditional African culture and the isiXhosa language and so disrupt the assimilation into white culture that often goes unquestioned (Erasmus & De Wet, 2011). A sense of value is not only cultivated in communal terms, but also through individual notions of brilliance expressed through notions of the self as an intellectual, artist and entrepreneur. Technological practices thus function within a culture with very particular values, values that are highly important to these young people who feel their sense of self constantly under attack. In the next chapter I will show that both values and technical skills are not just acquired overnight, but that a gradual process of becoming a more central member of the group is tied to developing such skills and values. Such a gradual acquisition of new skills and values, I will show, become for the hip-hop artists a form of progress related to imminent social mobility. Given the great significance given to dreams of social mobility in these desperate circumstances, as this chapter has

demonstrated, this association offers further explanation for the time and effort invested in digital skills acquisition.

The ideas established in this chapter around how different notions of personhood are incorporated into hip-hop culture will be extended in both chapters 5 and 6, where I investigate how such notions of personhood affect digital practices as hip-hop artists produce work in the backyard studio and distribute this on the internet. These challenge individualistic productivist notions of digital creativity (Jackson, 2014), and instead promote an approach that mixes notions of communally minded and individualistic digital brilliance. Such digital creativity will be shown to reside not only in the production of digital media, but also in communal digital practices such as learning from each other, communal repair cultures, and finding innovative shortcuts around distribution in conditions of limited infrastructure.

Chapter Five: The cypher and the mobile phone as entry points into the hip-hop community of practice

This chapter explains how hip-hop artists are recruited into hip-hop culture through the “cypher”, a communal hip-hop performance space. Through such cyphers hip-hop artists reclaim both the township and broader Grahamstown as their own, as both a non-violent and a post-apartheid space, so enacting the “tactics” of the oppressed to reclaim space (De Certeau, 2011/1980).

The previous chapter explained how the hip-hop artists reject the symbolic order that legitimates domination and violent identities, and embrace a politics that values African culture, black ingenuity and the resilience of poor people. That chapter made some reference to the importance of reflexivity (Giddens, 1984) in reconceptualising the self. It also showed how hip-hop artists resist internalising the demeaning perspective of the Other (Fanon, 2008/1952; Sennett & Cobb, 1972) through combining a communally orientated notion of self with notions of individualised excellence through the identity of the intellectual, the artist and the entrepreneur. It, however, did not otherwise really explain the process of transforming subjectivity, and how this is possible, given the powerful influence of social structure and the habitus (Bourdieu, 1995). The main contribution of this chapter is to conceptualise hip-hop in Grahamstown as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where shared values and belonging is created through situated learning, where a sense of moving towards full membership is created through progressively mastering various practices. I argue in this chapter, that such a sense of progression provides a key motivation for marginalised township youth to become involved in hip-hop, and stay involved, as it provides an alternative notion of social mobility. In this process of becoming a full member, and learning these practices, newcomers gradually take on the values and identity of the CoP, so transforming their subjectivity (Wenger, 1999). In the hip-hop community, this is called becoming a “hip-hop head”, a person who embodies the values of hip-hop culture. In Grahamstown such values are defined through black consciousness and the performance of a skilled, intellectual, artistic, entrepreneurial identity, as described in the previous chapter. This chapter’s contribution is to show how such values are developed through various practices, including digital practices that foster this sense of becoming part of the CoP.

The cypher is the space where newcomers are welcomed into hip-hop culture. In the cypher one may observe how the hip-hop artists are socialised into rejecting the hegemonic violent masculinity in this space, by adopting a communally orientated, competitive, skilled

and controlled “sober” masculinity. Here newcomers were disciplined into taking on the political values of “conscious” hip-hop by established “hip-hop heads” who challenged any references to hegemonic violent masculinity through skilled confrontational verbal performances they call “the beef”. While young women were actively encouraged to participate in the cypher, this focus on reconceptualising masculinity may have created a social culture somewhat alien from conventional feminine modes of expression (Tannen, 1982), so limiting female participation. Through the cypher, hip-hop artists expressed an “extreme sense of locality” (Q. E. Williams & Stroud, 2010) by performing the languages and traditions that permeated the neighbourhoods they came from. The cypher was also the space where newcomers were disciplined into honing their digital skills, particularly in relation to their mobile practices, through mobilising discourses of “professionalism”, one of the key aspirations of Grahamstown hip-hop.

Whereas the cypher is the entry-point for learning many of the performative practices of hip-hop, the mobile phone in itself also acts as an entry point to developing digital skills in the hip-hop CoP. As mobile phones are ubiquitous among young people in the townships, practices that incorporate the mobile phone become the first digital hip-hop “peripheral practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) these newcomers learn. Through such mobile phone practices, they demonstrate their membership of the hip-hop community, particularly in demonstrating its values of making-do and ingenuity, and “professional” mastery of technical skills.

5.1 The cypher as entry point into hip-hop as a community of practice

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992, p. 464) define a community of practice as “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor...and practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor”. While the Grahamstown township hip-hop scene did not consist of one structure but was made up of various loosely affiliated crews, it may be considered a CoP as these crews were all involved in a similar endeavour, producing “conscious” hip-hop tracks, and engaging in various similar practices such as hosting cyphers and producing and distributing hip-hop. In a CoP, new members are motivated to learn the community’s practices as this allows them to gradually acquire legitimacy from those at the centre, the “old-timers” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Wenger (2010) describes this process of belonging through practice as shaping identity because he considers identity to be essentially temporal, and rooted in a sense of the self on a pathway or trajectory.

As trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present. They give significance to events in relation to time construed as an extension of the self. They provide a context in which to determine what, among all the things that are potentially significant, actually becomes significant learning. A sense of trajectory gives us ways of sorting out what matters and what does not, what contributes to our identity and what remains marginal (Wenger, 2010, p. 134).

In such a trajectory, identity and belonging are shaped through gradually developing ability in various practices, where such practices are all associated with different levels of legitimacy in the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Members can thus have different paths and master different practices to establish their belonging and legitimacy at the centre of the CoP (Wenger, 2010). While formal school education occurs primarily through verbal instruction and observation, learning in a CoP is active and occurs through “legitimate peripheral participation” so that newcomers feel part of the community from the start, even though the first practices they learn offer limited legitimacy and belonging (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Belonging drives learning in a CoP, as it is not based on the prescriptive two-way didactic relationship between a teacher and learner, but emerges out of a triadic relationship between people at various levels of legitimacy in their participation, the “master, young master and newcomer” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 56). Newcomers carve out a space for themselves in the CoP not by simply copying masters, but by adopting the values of the community and competing with others to get those at the centre to consider their practices as legitimate, so creating a space not only to learn existing practices, but also to improvise new practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95). If we consider hip-hop in Grahamstown to be a community of practice, this means that understanding how new members are recruited and develop a sense of legitimacy and belonging is crucial to understanding this CoP. Here the cypher was one of the most important ways of attracting new members.

Younger hip-hop artists would often gather to create cyphers on street corners of Grahamstown’s townships, where they would engage in freestyle rap performances. A cypher is a low-tech performance as it requires only people, and expresses communal values through turn taking and collaboration, while also facilitating individual expression (Kuttner & White-Hammond, 2015). In the rappers’ cypher on the street corners of Grahamstown, there was no particular need for technology, as it was possible for someone to create a beat through the beatbox technique of verbally simulating percussion with various sounds, hisses and clicks. Sometimes one of the rappers would play a beat on a phone. Rappers would rap over this beat, either by repeating memorised lyrics or making them up as they went along. The street

corner cypher appeared like a chaotic crowd of people from the outside, but was made up of a circle of competing rappers, around which spectators congregated in another outside circle. Zion Eyes explained that sometimes older people would approach the group assume that they were fighting, only to discover that they were singing, and leave impressed. In this manner, hip-hop artists were involved in transforming the space, replacing violent confrontations between young men with peaceful competition. In the cypher, they could perform their moral lifestyle, as part of their identity. The botanical garden was a favourite site for rappers to gather, and they liked to assemble when the Rhodes student drumming group were practising here, thus allowing them to perform over a djembe beat. Sometimes they would visit a girls high school hostel in town and perform for the girls. Through the cypher, hip-hop artists would thus lay claim to public space (Forman, 2004a), inserting their voice to not only transform spaces which were at times violent and dangerous, like township street corners, but also the “white” parts of town such as the hostel and botanical garden, which township youth had been excluded from, creating a space where artists could meet as equals. Twenty years into democracy black subjects are still policed in public spaces (Faull, 2016). One may conceptualise this occupation of space as a “tactic” (De Certeau, 2011/1980) for its transformation, where hip-hop artists were “trespassing” to challenge persistent violent and racist definitions of space.

These cyphers were open to all hip-hop artists who wanted to join, involving a series of turn-taking and poetic dialogue between rappers, and it was here new members were recruited and socialised into a conscious hip-hop ethos. In considering hip-hop as a community of practice, we may therefore conceptualise the cypher as the site where “newcomers” are recruited into this community through a simple task or “peripheral practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). We may consider hip-hop “freestyle” rapping such a peripheral practice. Freestyling is an oral practice of the hip-hop cypher that involves verbal performance, turn-taking, and verbal confrontation. Its impromptu nature means that the freestyle artist may enter and retreat from the centre of the cypher at any time, generally by following the turn-taking rules (Edwards, 2009; Perkins, 1996). As such freestyle performances are not recorded and so never commodified, they are embraced by certain purists who abhor commercialism and earn respect through such performances alone (e.g. see *Rhyme & Reason* documentary, directed by Peter Spirer, 1997). However, in Grahamstown there was an expectation that one would progress from freestyling towards recording a track. Freestyling may thus be seen here as a “peripheral practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) because while the newcomers have not progressed to creating a complete track, they were

nevertheless allowed to actively take part in a practice, the freestyle, that formed a small but important part of the “mutual engagement” that unifies this community. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that it is this focus on getting newcomers immediately involved in a meaningful practice that makes CoPs such powerful spaces for learning, as a sense of belonging is fostered from the beginning through such participation.

The term “community” in “community of practice” may be somewhat misleading as it does not imply a harmonious collaboration, but conflict between “old-timers” and “new-comers” in transferring legitimacy is part of this definition (Cox, 2005). Here conflict is mobilised as a challenge to embrace the art of the “master” and learn from him. Indeed, hip-hop artists globally often jokingly invoke the martial arts trope of the grand master calling the young upstart’s kung fu weak, so setting in motion the challenge (Kato, 2012). In the Grahamstown hip-hop culture, such conflict was evident in the socialisation of newcomers. Experience producer Azlan explained that calling a performance clumsy or “wack” in the cypher could be harsh for newcomers, but it was generally a directed criticism aimed at helping beginners develop.

Azlan: In hip-hop, you don’t perfect your skills the first time you come in...you would come in as a beginner. If they say you wack, like it’s a judgement – but it’s a straight-forward judgement that you lack, there and there. You need to upgrade – there, and there, and there. So you have to improve to become something better next time (Personal communication, 6 March 2014).

Such criticism was not just directed at the quality of the delivery, but the content of the lyrics, so socialising new hip-hop artists into the “conscious” values of established hip-hop heads. Ret and Nova would often host “conscious” cyphers in their neighbourhood, where they would respond to the freestyle lyrics of a new rapper, focusing criticism on newcomers who did not display a positive “conscious” attitude, but tried to emulate gangsta hip-hop styles in glorifying conspicuous consumption or violence. Hip-hop artists referred to such verbal confrontations as “the beef”, which implied not only an aggressive put-down, but also a superior wielding of words, where intelligence and verbal dexterity were paramount in winning the favour of the crowd huddled around them. This notion of the “beef” in Grahamstown as peer criticism is somewhat unusual. The “beef” in hip-hop is generally perceived as a provocation between artists that leads to violence, which is based in real enmity or may be just a commercial strategy (A. D. Williams, 2009, p. 15). In Grahamstown “the beef” was not about violent threats, but mental competition.

Ret and Nova's song *Fluister* focused on educating new hip-hop artists in their neighbourhood through such cyphers. *Fluister* was inspired by Grahamstown's "conscious" hip-hop radio show *Food for thought*'s title and extends its nutrition-based metaphor. In the track, Ret and Nova describe their community street corner cypher as a "feeding scheme" where other hip-hop artists are "vegetarian" because they have no knowledge of "the beef". Such rappers simply wanted to have fun, or embraced a version of gangsta rap, they explained, while their lyrics were focused on a social purpose such as "keeping the streets squeaky clean" from drug dealers. They battled through these cyphers to socialise the new rappers, engaging them in a "beef" which they described playfully in the *Fluister* track as feeding them "steak".

Call me broomstick 'cause I'm keeping the streets squeaky clean
 Getting rid of the brothers selling weed at the younger kids
 A lot of cats are having problems adapting to this feeding scheme
 So, we sit here feed em steak 'cause they don't know beef
 A bunch of vegetarian rappers, rapping to get the people
 Respecting da talent that we use as a weapon
 Grappling action. Across your face to keep you silent
 It's like a strait jacket. To stop u from getting violent.

Such extended metaphors, like *Fluister*'s use of food to describe the socialisation process, were part of the competitive character of "the beef". The hip-hop heads' superior verbal skills, expressed through puns and personification, generally allowed them to win such battles. Owing to their extensive experience in writing and performing hip-hop lyrics, the established hip-hop heads would invariably produce a more accomplished performance, asserting their status in the hip-hop hierarchy, and in this way the "conscious" message was also promoted. In Grahamstown, the "beef" was thus seen as a way to hone both political understanding and a higher standard for artistic excellence.

Dezz: And comparing to the other cities or other towns that I've been to, or the artists from these different towns – I still think Grahamstown is best when it comes to poetry and hip-hop. Especially if it's in Xhosa we make sure that we write well. I think what made us like that is the...is the beef and the judgement between the artists (Personal communication, 23 October 2014).

At the cypher, established hip-hop artists therefore performed both their politics and their skill through such verbal dexterity. Newcomers were made aware that to be a hip-hop

MC, you needed to be a “mastermind”. Zion Eyes described how those who failed to achieve this status were often berated and told to visit the library to improve their knowledge. Hip-hop artists attributed Grahamstown’s tradition of powerful lyrics with a social message to such cyphers, where the “beef” ensured that writing skill was prioritised and focused on a social message, so socialising hip-hop artists into adopting the “conscious” identity of this community of practice. Oz remembered listening to older hip-hop artists as a young boy, and experiencing such verbal skill as if someone “could write a thesis on one line” and “explode your mind” through its cleverness, and challenge you “to think beyond what you think you are”. Wenger (1999) argues that CoPs allow for the reconceptualisation of learning not simply as the transfer of knowledge, but as a process of doing (through practices), a process of belonging (by gradually becoming a member of the community), and a process of becoming and taking on an identity (through internalising the meanings of the practices). For this reason, a CoP is particularly powerful not just as enabling learning, but also in changing people’s identity.

Hip-hop could transform one from an ordinary township teenage boy who was not averse to violence, to someone who, after becoming a regular hip-hop artist and library member, developed a fluent mastery of English, isiXhosa or Afrikaans or even all three languages, and an identity focused on being just such a “mastermind”. How is transformation possible in the face of symbolic power? It is possible to both accept that the social structure restricts the embodied dispositions of individuals to accept their social position (Bourdieu, 1995), while at the same time considering the possibility of people being able to break free from these and challenge their conditions. Mutch (2003) argues that it may be valuable to consider the interplay of structure and practice by combining Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus with the notion of the community of practice. Where Bourdieu (1995) understands the structures of society to condition practice through the dispositions they have inculcated subjectively in the habitus, and so constraining agency, the CoP approach presents a model where transformation of subjectivity may emerge from practice, thus facilitating agency (Mutch, 2003, p. 390). Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the concept of CoPs by linking their observations of how situated learning transformed identity with Giddens’ (1979) structuration approach, in which structure and agency are mediated through practices. This means that we can conceptualise the relationship between structure and agency to be dynamic and operating in both directions through repeating or changing practices. Not only do social structures work through practices to restrain agency, but reflecting on and changing taken-for-granted routines or practices may transform consciousness to facilitate agency to change

social structure (Giddens, 1984). In the CoP model, it is the social nature of acquiring new practices, making sense of these collectively and relating those to new ways of being which drives transformation of identity and allows for new forms of agency (Wenger, 1999). In Grahamstown, the possibilities for moving up in the hip-hop hierarchy towards a more central position in the CoP allowed an alternative sense of mobility to the processes of social mobility these artists were generally excluded from. Hip-hop artists would frequently refer to their sense of progress when they were learning new digital skills or when they had reached a milestone in terms of releasing a track. It was the metaphor Ongidaru chose to describe his crew's attitude, which had kept them going for the past seven years.

Ongidaru: You know we're just trying to progress! So, that's what it's all about – progression! So, you got to go up and from there just keep elevating! (Personal communication, 14 August 2014)

Rapper Rymgees would frequently refer to hip-hop in visual metaphors of social mobility, describing it in entrepreneurial rhetoric as a ladder: “ek het daai leer geklim geklim” (I climbed and climbed that ladder). Since he left school two years ago Rymgees had been spending his days making hip-hop, playing rugby and working out in the gym. Despite his muscled physique he was wiry with enormous quizzical eyebrows and a penchant for melodrama and exaggerated dance moves, which made it hard for others to take him seriously, especially when he wore his favourite green fake fur earmuffs. Rymgees spoke about creating a new hip-hop song in the same way one would describe an entrepreneurial venture, as an opportunity you had to grab “with both hands”, where you have to motivate yourself and set goals for yourself every day. Echoing meritocratic discourses, he referred to his work ethic to explain his achievements in hip-hop. “*Ek het hard gewerk waar ek nou is*” (I worked hard to get where I am now). There is no doubt that Rymgees spent hours every day working on his hip-hop music, as I spent extended periods witnessing such efforts. However, hip-hop is here described in the language of the entrepreneurial self-help text: setting goals, self-motivation, hard work, the right mindset, and inevitable success. Yet Rymgees had never been able to sell a hip-hop track, and in his household, where everyone was unemployed, they survived through remittances. His mother had worked for a short while doing home-based care as a community health worker, but had injured her back while turning the patients. Circumstances could not be described as easy at home. Through hip-hop, he was able to conceptualise himself as progressing and moving up the “ladder” towards success, even if such success was purely measured in terms of mastering hip-hop practices and producing hip-

hop tracks. Such references to progress were common among Grahamstown hip-hop artists and they would use all sorts of metaphors to describe it such as “moving forward” or “moving to another level”. Therefore, the idea of a hierarchy in hip-hop, whether this was conceptualised in terms of skill, popularity with fans, or esteem in the community itself, arguably presents young people who had very little prospect for social mobility with a way to imagine that it was indeed possible. One may therefore consider this notion of progress an important factor that attracted young people to join the community of practice, in which a particular subjectivity was shaped through belonging and moving closer to the centre.

Such notions of progress were, however, complicated by material differences between the hip-hop heads. Hip-hop heads such as XNasty, Words and Oz, who had somewhat better material circumstances than the others and access to superior equipment such as iPad tablets and DSLR cameras, also had greater legitimacy in the hip-hop CoP. They regularly produced work for funders, and invoked notions of professionalism to describe the superior technical quality of their work.

Oz: Possibilities are there – all you have to do is just work. And whatever you do you have to professionalise it in a way where it’s applicable to people who are going to go “Oh my goodness, I can watch this!” or whatever. If you’re an artist and you’re broke, you’re just not working hard enough (Personal communication, 13 May 2014).

In this statement, one may therefore observe the discourse of meritocracy, which acknowledges the potential of hip-hop artists from all walks of life to succeed, but does not acknowledge the advantages of social capital and access to equipment a hip-hop artist like Oz may have. Nevertheless, despite this distinction, Oz, Words and XNasty championed a more integrated black society and remained committed to assisting other hip-hop artists to achieve this professional standard. Through a website aimed at promoting local hip-hop shows to students from Rhodes University, Oz saw himself repackaging and promoting the “skilled but unprofessional” performances of Grahamstown hip-hop artists and to “professionalise what we call dirty street culture” so that he could help change the lives of struggling local hip-hop artists. In referring to “dirty street culture”, Oz was of course referring to how outsiders viewed township hip-hop, a view he was keen to challenge. XNasty regularly organised skills workshops through Fingo Festival to build skills, particularly among those hip-hop artists who had little access to resources. Such black cross-class interaction and solidarity with those who had less than them had in recent years become unusual in the township, XNasty

explained, as those who had some wealth would generally cut off all social interaction with those who had none, creating impermeable symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

XNasty: It's because how they measure success – what does success mean – it means “Don't touch me, don't talk to me”. Also success, to the people that doesn't have the money that those people have, it means “Don't go to them”, or “I wish, when I have money, I'm going to be friends with them”. So, these guys who have more money than me may be business men, politicians, they don't want to be friends with me because of what I say, and what I stand for (Personal communication, 22 April 2014).

Hip-hop's black consciousness message of seeing other black people as “brothers” or “sisters” (Biko, 1978) allowed these young people to oppose such socially exclusive circles and express a black cross-class solidarity. The Grahamstown hip-hop community therefore broke down “symbolic boundaries” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) that separated people and instead believed that everyone could engage in a trajectory towards success and social mobility. Instead of accepting class divisions, each hip-hop artists was envisaged to have the potential to develop themselves through acquiring “professional” skills, and thus this spoke to their acceptance of the “meritocracy myth” (McNamee & Miller, 2004), where such skills were considered to provide the ability for social mobility in a meritocratic society. A “professional standard” became one of the key indicators of progression in the trajectory of developing hip-hop skills, particularly in terms of developing technical skills, illustrating how the hip-hop community of practice here was both resisting the symbolic order by resisting symbolic boundaries, while operating within it by believing that society would reward them for the acquisition of hip-hop skills and allow them social mobility on the basis of this.

The CoP does not simply reproduce an identical sense of identity in each member, but the tension between newcomers and old-timers as practices change over time means that newcomers in their drive towards their own legitimacy in the community improvise particular roles for themselves and so craft their own identities (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 16). Members are able to improvise, as learning practices in a CoP are not prescribed, but since there is a range of “modes of co-participation”, this allows various pathways or “trajectories” to full participation when the person is eventually perceived as a legitimate, full member of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 16). Thus identity emerges from the particular trajectory the newcomer embarks on within the CoP, moving from peripheral participation to full participation (Wenger, 2010, pp. 133–134). In the hip-hop community, there were several

trajectories to legitimacy and achieving the “central practices” of this CoP, or becoming a “hip-hop head”, which included being a celebrated hip-hop performer or an organiser skilled at fundraising. This dissertation, however, mainly focuses on the technical trajectory which allows a hip-hop artist access to the centre of the community through becoming a producer.

5.2 The larger cypher performance, and the meanings of its mobile practices

Besides these very informal small cyphers, more formal performances were organised in library halls and other public venues, which were also referred to as cyphers²¹ when it was exclusively a hip-hop event. Such larger cyphers required a host, who would book the venue, organise a sound system, and publicise the event. It was invariably the more established hip-hop heads who organised these in Grahamstown, and the organisational skill to pull it off was considerable. It involved either persuading people who had very little money to pay for the event, or persuading the venue and equipment providers to give these for free, or engaging in fundraising and finding a sponsor. One of the organisers would then act as the MC of the event.

As a “conscious” hip-hop event, there was a serious effort to create a space that encapsulated these values. This was much harder to establish than in a small informal cypher, as the amplified sound created a large performance space and attracted many outsiders. I witnessed the difficulty of doing this at an event organised by the Imin’esidenge crew on a large open field in Vukani, one of Grahamstown’s poorest townships. Dezz, the leader of the group, was responsible for most of the organising, and had tried his best to make this a safe event. The crew had picked a Sunday when the township was generally quiet, and an afternoon so churchgoers could attend, and by late morning many children had gathered to watch them set up. The event marked the acquisition of the crew’s powerful sound system, which cost them R6 000 second-hand, and which had taken many months of fundraising through a capella performances in front of the Grahamstown cathedral. It was a moment of pride and acknowledgement for the Imin’esidenge crew. At the start of the performance just after lunch, there were mainly children, young women and churchgoers coming back from the morning service watching the performance. As the hip-hop performers followed one another with messages condemning alcohol and crime and urging people to remember their traditions, a few young men started skulking on the margins, sipping beers from large quart

²¹ In Cape Town, such larger performances were often called “parkjams” (Pritchard, 2011), but in Grahamstown it was common to refer to them as cyphers.

bottles. As I left the event in the late afternoon, I noticed that a young man at the top of the field was shouting aggressively at a young woman who was trying to back away from him, but he kept following her, shouting at her and reaching forward as if to slap her. I considered intervening, but felt intimidated. The next day, I heard that the event had had to be cancelled, as another young man had intervened to stop the argument and was stabbed and ended up in hospital. The crew organised several other events that year, but all of these took place in the town library hall. While hip-hop was about reclaiming space (Forman, 2004a), this was difficult in an unpredictable environment.

Zion Eyes: Sometimes there are things that you just – they just happen, you did not expect them. So, it's more like that, every day you just pray that you will get home safe. Things are unpredictable at this time. Everyone is just getting chaotic because of anger and frustrations at the things that they are facing at home...so it's one of the things that people actually don't talk about (Personal communication, 15 August 2014).

These performances were very sober affairs and frequently had signs that indicated that no alcohol was allowed. At two of the events I attended, a drunken older person stumbled into the venue to dance wildly among the visibly embarrassed crowd of very sober young people, accentuating how very different the hip-hop scene was in comparison to other youth music scenes where alcohol was ubiquitous, such as rock or kwaito concerts. Hip-hop artists wanted their audience to listen thoughtfully to their lyrics and engage with them intellectually, so they would be able to reflect on them in relation to their own lives. This should be understood in relation to the reflexivity demanded by the black consciousness project, which was about reclaiming the mind of the oppressed (Biko, 1978), and thus demanded an intellectual disposition. There was some energetic dancing at these events, but definitely no dancing that was in any way flirtatious or sexual. Some hip-hop artists actually preferred it when people did not dance at all, and saw this as an expression of their ability to avoid consumerist indulgences and instead produce thoughtful lyrics.

Dezz: We try our best to let our peers know that we should stick to what we are doing right now, not change the whole genre to be that fly swagger hip-hop 'cause we don't do that here in Grahamstown. We have rappers that want to be heard. You know when you recite a verse or recite a stanza or what, you want to make sure that people don't dance to what you are saying but listen to it. So we don't

make music to make people dance (Personal communication, 23 October 2014).

When I suggested to Azlan that he might have many adoring female fans as a hip-hop artist, he was decidedly dismissive and scornful, and commented that women should rather channel their energy into performing on stage. Hip-hop performance was considered a serious matter and decidedly not frivolous. As Butler (2002) argues, gender is performative, and not defined by biology, but by particular behaviours that come to be associated with masculinity or femininity through repeated performances. Hip-hop artists rejected the dominant masculinity which was expressed through violence and promiscuity. Instead their masculinity was expressed through the earnest, competitive performance of technical and verbal skill. This seriousness, rationality, and the challenging demeanour of the “beef” were part of the bodily expression of the hip-hop habitus here. IThala Lenyani would often practise his performance in front of the mirror to get just the right poses to accompany his words. I helped him extract stills from a video of one of his performances for his *Facebook* page. He specifically chose poses that were quite taunting and aggressive, settling on a slightly blurred image for his profile pic, where he has his one hand on his hip and his mouth curled up in a snarl, while his other hand points directly at the audience. It was clearly not the quality of the photograph, but the challenging bodily pose that was the deciding factor. I grabbed a few stills in clear focus where he had a nice broad smile, but he dismissed these as inappropriate. “Heads don’t smile,” said XNasty when I was taking a group photo of a lecture by hip-hop heads from PE, and ignorantly asked them to smile for the photo. The performance of masculinity in hip-hop was clearly not about pleasing others, but in challenging them and making them think.

While Lave and Wenger’s (1991) work on communities of practice suggests the existence of power struggles between newcomers and old-timers, such power dynamics are not explored in further detail in Wenger’s (1999) subsequent expansion of the topic. Foucault (1979) shows that knowledge and power are intractably related, which suggests that issues of power cannot be neglected in studying a learning organisation like a CoP (Fox, 2000). The CoP approach fails to explain how power in broader society impacts on the community of practice, or to describe power relations between members other than the newcomer/old-timer dynamic (Fox, 2000). Thus, it does not relate the values and identities adopted in a CoP as possibly emerging as a response to issues of power in broader society. One of this dissertation’s contributions is to show that the Grahamstown hip-hop CoP developed in

response to the forces of broader society and the powers that underpin social structure which robbed young people of their sense of self-worth. In terms of power relations between members outside of the old-timer/newcomer dynamic, gender power dynamics in this hip-hop CoP clearly defined this community of practice. In Grahamstown hip-hop, there were very few women, and they did not seem to occupy any leadership positions. Female rapper Bliss explained that men dominated the local hip-hop scene.

Bliss: The thing is, hip-hop is more dominated, you know, us female MCs, the males are more dominant than us. So, it's not that I'm trying to prove a point, but I am trying to send a message that we're equal. It doesn't mean that it can actually be men who can only do the hip-hop movement, or the b-boy or the cyphers, we can all do that, you know (Personal communication, 30 November 2013).

One needs to acknowledge that South Africa, despite the model gender policies in its constitution, is still in many ways a patriarchal society in which women often struggle to find a voice (Morrell et al., 2012). Gender power imbalances in a community of practice may indeed emanate from the discourses of broader society (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992), and it may not be correct to hold the hip-hop community responsible for such domination. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) consider how different CoPs may be aligned to different gender “subcultures”. This notion of gender “subcultures” should not be understood to apply to all men and women, but is rather a picture of a statistical “average” or of normative male and female roles, where the female “subculture” favours connection with others and intimacy, and a male “subculture” favours competition and public performance (Tannen, 1982). Such gender “subcultures” should not essentialise gender, but should be understood in relation to power in society, where due to structures of domination, women, for example, would often be socialised to be less assertive (Lakoff, 1975).

The competitive nature of the “beef”, some artists acknowledged, may be why hip-hop was not so popular with young women, who preferred less confrontational performances. Young women in Grahamstown often came into hip-hop through poetry, a medium that provided a safe space for the sharing of intimate thoughts and vulnerabilities, and so more suited to a conventionally feminine “subculture” (Tannen, 1982). Zion Eyes was a leader in the township’s poetry circles and realised that many young female poets did not even perform their poems at weekly poetry club meetings, but only shared their writing with close friends. Occasionally these women would send him their poetry over *WhatsApp* for his comment, instead of performing it. Nevertheless, a few young women crossed over into hip-hop and did

occasionally perform on stage. Oz was, however, sceptical whether women would be comfortable in sharing “the beef” as women discussed issues in a less aggressive, more mature manner, he thought. It was not only a matter of conventionally feminine temperament. Oz had witnessed how women, who attempt “the beef” and a “hardcore” style, are aggressively dismissed as “dykes” or lesbians by other rappers, and then leave the hip-hop scene shortly afterwards. Nevertheless, there were several rappers who actively promoted female participation, such as XNasty and Adon Geel, who embraced a less aggressive, more family-orientated form of hip-hop, with a powerful social message. The female participants credited their involvement to these young men. XNasty, for example, would often confront other rappers who included misogynist terms in their tracks. He described how he intervened in a cypher, challenging the artists to not just accept terms common in everyday language, but to take responsibility for their own language.

XNasty: To call someone a bitch, it’s a hard thing. Women, men say it. It’s language now. When you say this person is this thing, what do you mean by that? Would you want to say that to your mother? Would you want to say that to your daughter? Would you want someone to say that to your girlfriend? So, when you reverse the conscious of a person, it becomes hard. Because now they say: “Ja man, everybody says it”. Then you say “But you’re not everybody, you’re an individual. That individual that is you will not be affected with everyone what they say. You should make your own mind up” (Personal communication, 22 April 2014).

This example shows how a leader in the community of practice who has the power to challenge the legitimacy of a practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) can indeed help to create more female-inclusive spaces. Here XNasty’s challenge to the rapper to take responsibility for individual actions encapsulates the sense of agency hip-hop culture and the black consciousness philosophy promoted in this space. It shows the power of the cypher to promote such ideas and “reverse the conscious” of hip-hop artists in the socialisation process towards full membership of the CoP.

As set out in the previous chapter, the Grahamstown “conscious” hip-hop scene may be understood as a response to a hegemonic consumerist, violent masculinity, and was predominantly concerned with re-imagining masculinity as skilled and righteous, a masculinity focused on competence and morality. Hip-hop artists were concerned with promoting this alternative notion of masculinity. The Imin’esidenge crew had deliberately

gone out and recruited teenage boys interested in hip-hop as a way of reaching out to the next generation. They aimed to protect them from becoming involved in a violent culture and to encourage them to dedicate themselves to their music and their schoolwork. Dezz felt involving women in the group would complicate this project.

Dezz: We don't have like a thing maybe against women, we love women. The thing is: we're still trying to...work with these young boys, make sure everything they're doing is right (Personal communication, 10 March 2015).

While hip-hop in Grahamstown accommodated young women, it was arguably not a community of practice orientated towards addressing female needs. It is not uncommon for CoPs to form around practices which fulfil particular needs related to gender (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992).

The cypher can be described as a performance that represents an “extreme sense of locality”, and in South Africa this sense of local place is often created through multilingual rapping (Q. E. Williams & Stroud, 2010, p. 40). Grahamstown cyphers displayed this sense of locality through referencing Xhosa traditions. There was a flexibility in the genre, and artists alternated between rapping to a beat, spoken-word poetry and traditional isiXhosa imbongi praise poetry. At a local performance I attended, Ako, a fresh-faced teenage member of the Imin'esidenge crew, praised the organisers in isiXhosa imbongi poetry for being as dedicated to the arts “as a dog chasing a car wheel in the township”. This illustrates how artists were re-infusing the traditional form with contemporary metaphors, applying the same dedication to verbal dexterity as they did in hip-hop. Hip-hop artists would research old figures of speech and words that had fallen into disuse in the township, and resuscitated these in their rhymes. Zion Eyes, for example, was particularly proud that he had rediscovered the word “rhubulusa”, which means to slide on the belly like a reptile, to describe local gossipers. It was not commonly used in the township, and originated in the rural areas, but he felt he was enriching the language by re-introducing it. The aptly named hip-hop organiser, Words, saw it as their duty as artists to revisit the colonial history of dictionary production in South Africa and to particularly question isiXhosa words derived from colonial languages. For “coloured” hip-hop artists this “extreme sense of locality” (Q. E. Williams & Stroud, 2010) was created through the celebration of their multilingualism, typical of “coloured” people in the Eastern Cape, rapping songs that included Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa.

Retaliation and Nova embodied a challenge to regressive notions of “coloured” identity conceptualised in terms of miscegenation, where mixtures of the “races” were considered to produce people defined through a sense of lack, thus also lacking in terms of culture (Adhikari, 2005). Instead Ret and Nova demonstrated how people of mixed heritage are able to creatively combine elements from different cultures to create a rich culture defined not by lack but by abundance, through a process of creolisation (Erasmus, 2001). Both had attended Xhosa manhood initiation, despite the fact that they grew up speaking Afrikaans in what the rest of Grahamstown considered a “coloured” neighbourhood. However, the reality was that this poor neighbourhood was also home to many Xhosa families and now so intermarried that apartheid definitions did not really apply anymore. Thus Retaliation and Nova were particularly concerned with healing the apartheid divisions between black crews still defined by apartheid township geography. They saw themselves as black and often avoided apartheid terms to describe different townships. I attended an event they organised on the border between what they termed “dié kant” (this side), and “oorkant” (the other side) or Xhosa townships. The event took place on the large cemented square outside the ruins of the old ambulance headquarters which was covered in graffiti and affectionately known locally as “Hola-Hola”. Ret and Nova had persuaded Azlan to set up his equipment on the small platform overlooking the square in front of the municipal community offices. Local parents sat on the brick wall on the side with their children, while young people stood in little groups on the square, facing the “stage” which hosted not only the hip-hop artists, but also a few local councilors and community leaders on plastic chairs drinking soft drinks, who had to be invited so that Azlan could get electrical power from the municipal offices. Retaliation and Nova had gone to considerable effort to invite various Xhosa and “coloured” crews and made several announcements during the event related to unity despite linguistic differences. Embracing such a black consciousness identity was a central value of the community of practice of Grahamstown hip-hop, and established heads like Retaliation and Nova saw its cultivation as important among new hip-hop artists. In the reclaiming of space in Grahamstown, hip-hop artists thus not only reclaimed spaces in town, but found ways to blur artificial apartheid borders between various townships and create spaces for fostering new ties for black people separated by apartheid geography, so facilitating new “creolised” black identities where people could combine different cultural practices to fashion their own identities (Erasmus, 2001).

5.3 The mobile phone as a way of incorporating the self into hip-hop culture

Hip-hop artists showed their membership of the community of practice through what they did with their mobile phones, so displaying a skilled identity. The mobile phone, as a technology available to most hip-hop artists, was integrated into a range of practices, which included composing lyrics, capturing performances, networking with the crew and fans, manipulating images and rehearsing for recordings. It was also used to distribute hip-hop media, which will be dealt with in a subsequent chapter. I show two ways below in which the mobile phone and the technologies of the cypher are used to recruit newcomers into the CoP: the digital practices associated with rapping in the cypher, and the digital practices related to social networking.

The mobile phone and demonstrating belonging in hip-hop culture as a rapper

Among hip-hop artists, mobile phones were not only used for social networking, but they explored the full functionality of their phones. Satyanarayanan (2005) has critiqued mobile phone design for trying too hard to adopt a “Swiss Army knife” model of multiple functionality, which served no purpose when people had better access to these functions on other digital devices like computers and cameras. These hip-hop artists, in asserting a skilled competence of digital devices, did, however, make full use of most of the applications on the mobile phone as they generally did not own any other devices. The mobile feature phone with its multiple functions was particularly suited to this ecology of digital scarcity.

The mobile phone allowed hip-hop artists to assert a skilled identity, in a community where digital skills were particularly meaningful in showcasing their commitment to being “professional” and involved in a trajectory of digital learning. Many of the rappers, for example, recorded themselves rapping, using the recording app on their mobile phones, when an idea for a track came to them when they were on the move and did not have access to pen and paper. Hip-hop MCs needed pre-recorded beats to perform and rehearse and particularly to compose hip-hop lyrics that would “flow” well to the beat. A beat was not just drum rhythms and percussion, but all the musical elements needed to support the rap performance (Schloss, 2004). Many of the rappers used their mobile phones to download beats from sites like Tubidy.com. This was acceptable for a performance or the recording of a mixtape. A mixtape was an informal recording over freely available beats, and was released as soon as possible. It was an important step towards legitimacy for a rapper who was no longer a beginner, but lacked the status of an album, which marked a further rise in status and greater

legitimacy in this community of practice. An album was focused on the individual performance of a rapper and such a professional recording required original beats that had not been used by anyone else (Schloss, 2004).

Even if one had not yet recorded an album, having acquired such original beats was a sign of distinction for a rapper, showing that they were well on their way to do so. IThala Lenyani was proud that although he had not yet recorded a mixtape, he was ready for an album, as he had already purchased original beats from Adon Geel, a well-known producer from the nearby city, Port Elizabeth. Ownership of such original beats therefore positioned an artist closer to the centre of a CoP and conveyed a sense of legitimacy. Having a beat composed by a famous producer was particularly prestigious. Despite physical distance, producers from other parts of the country could easily send digital beats on the mobile phone through *Gmail*, which allowed uncompressed music files to be transferred online.

The top producers were able to sell their beats, but new producers needed rappers to use their beats to publicise their work. Retaliation and Nova regularly received beats free of charge from a friend in George, a rural town about 500kms away, who sent the beats to them over *WhatsApp*. They used Retaliation's girlfriend's phone, which had a USB interface, to plug into the USB slot of his DVD player to play the beats while they improvised lyrics together. This was not their only long-distance producer connection. They were particularly proud of the fact that they had managed to connect with a British producer who saw their page on *Soundcloud* and then made contact via *Facebook*. While the producer was a "white guy" and thus at first associated with their assumptions of a comfortable suburban life, they were intrigued to discover that he was also 'hood, and had struggled with drug abuse and was now clean but unemployed just as they were. Thus this interaction allowed Ret and Nova to get a sense of "symbolic distantiation" (Thompson, 2011), a new perspective on how race and class may intersect differently in a society other than South Africa. The UK producer told them that he was going to dedicate all his efforts to be their producer, which they saw as a huge affirmation of their crew's potential success. Retaliation and Nova cropped a digital photo of him and digitally added it to their crew avatar, making it look as if he was standing there with them. Many of the hip-hop artists used mobile phone apps to create stylised images from photographs, a practice that was common among creative township youth (Venter, 2015).

In their interaction with the British producer, Retaliation and Nova were able to demonstrate digital ingenuity. When they were not entirely satisfied with a beat he sent them over *Gmail*, and it did not match with the flow they were trying to create, they would try and

send him a digital “recording” so that he would understand the problem. They combined all the digital technology they had at their disposal to do this. They plugged one of their mobile phones into the DVD player’s USB slot to play the beat, while recording their performance on the other phone, from which they sent it back to the UK, again over *Gmail*. It was this kind of technical improvisation which hip-hop artists prided themselves on. They described it in terms of the hip-hop term “hustling”, which to them had none of the negative criminal connotations of Wacquant’s (1998a) American study, but was the practices of making-do, collaboration and charm that one had to rely on in the “ghetto” when one did not have the material resources of the “guys in the suburbs”. One may understand their use of the term “hustling” as related to notions of “becoming” in African personhood, where individual ingenuity to make things happen and accrue status occurs through creatively mobilising different social networks (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001).

In the cypher, hip-hop artists were also socialised into appropriate digital practices on-stage and off-stage. Mobile phones were ubiquitous at these events. Most people who attended were hip-hop artists themselves, and were keen to capture some of the performances of their friends and mentors. As each MC went up on stage, a sea of phones would be held up to take photographs or video the performance. The few artists who were privileged enough to afford tablets or DSLR cameras would capture the event from all sides, moving back and forth to get the perfect shot. In this way spectatorship became active, an expression of the skill of capturing the best shots of those who were performing. In the cypher, a newcomer would not only progress in terms of adopting a “conscious” attitude, but would do so alongside becoming more “professional” in their technical practices. The hip-hop artists were thus mobilising ideologies of professionalism for their own purposes (Fournier, 1999; Larson, 1977). The larger cypher performances involved a considerable amount of audio equipment, on loan or hired from one of the producers. At these performances, a laptop computer was connected to an analogue mixer, which fed the beat to the giant stereo speakers on both sides of the stage, and sound levels needed to be adjusted to match the sound coming from the stage microphone. Here freestyle performances similar to those performed on the street corners opened the event, and gradually progressed to more formal performances where hip-hop artists performed their latest tracks on top of their own pre-recorded musical “beats”. Having access to such beats was a sign that someone was no longer a “newcomer”, but becoming part of the hip-hop community, an in-between status that Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as a “journeyman” as opposed to a “newcomer” or “master”.

When an MC arrived at the event, the first thing he would do was write his name in a notebook for the order of the performance. Then he would approach the producer to ask to plug his mobile phone into the laptop via a USB cable to transfer the MP3 file for his beat, or he would Bluetooth it to the laptop. The producer would then place it in the playlist for the event. Copying the MP3 file onto the laptop allowed for more volume control, as the producer could adjust mixer levels, the computer's sound levels as well as the software. When an MC arrived late, or did not have a USB connection, he would often just plug his mobile phone into the mixer via the headphone cable, so that the producer could play the file from there. This created many problems as different phones had different impedance, and sometimes the volume would be low, and adjusting the mixer would lead to distortion of the sound. The inclusive spirit of these events meant that no one was ever refused participation, and producers took great pains to make sure the performance could continue. However, established hip-hop heads would describe such behaviour as "unprofessional". Such references to lack of technical competency or commitment to the professionalism of the true "hip-hop head" reflected a rapper's peripheral status in the community of practice.

The most stressful experience for MCs was not problems with the beat, but forgetting their words on stage – a humiliating experience. Main Event described how he had spent many hours practising his lyrics, only to forget them in a moment of stage fright at his first big performance at a cypher in a school hall. He ended up rapping some lyrics from a Tupac track, and luckily the audience did not seem to notice. At the end of the performance, the older hip-hop heads from his neighbourhood spoke to him for the first time, congratulating him on his performance. This further illustrates how such larger hip-hop cyphers marked a milestone of becoming part of the hip-hop CoP, even if this was with the limited status of the newcomer. However, to achieve further legitimacy involved pulling off a "professional" performance, without any faults such as forgetting lyrics. Memorising hip-hop lyrics was a difficult task since, compared to other genres, it did not rely on melody as an aide-memoire and involved much less repetition. Particular words needed to be stressed to create a rhythm that synergised with the rhythm of the accompanying music beat, a complex skill that was called "flow". Rehearsing a track over and over with the same beat as would be used in performance was the only guarantee of success, and the mobile phone here became an important tool because artists could practise while listening to the beat on their phones. Others used MP3 players or DVD players in their rooms to listen to the beat and rehearse for a performance. The discipline of rehearsal was considered a mark of professionalism,

authenticity and dedication to the craft, promising respect from others and possibilities of success and fame.

In contrast, there was only scorn for those hip-hop artists who arrived at a cypher with a beat with pre-recorded lyrics and who lip-synced their performance. XNasty had witnessed how crews fell apart when their recorded track could not be played over the sound system, which meant they could not lip-sync the words anymore. He saw this as an example of how increased access to digital technology such as recording studios was “making rappers lazy”. This example clearly shows that what was required was not simply an expression of skill through a faultless delivery and technical competence, but it was also important to deliver an authentic performance that was not stage-managed, but relied on the skill of the rapper in the moment. This as an expression of hip-hop’s “interactive quality” (T. Rose, 1994, p. 89), honouring its roots in an oral tradition and creating a particular relationship with each audience. Some rappers, such as Retaliation and Nova, explained that keeping up with a beat and staying in time was difficult, especially coming in at the right time for the chorus of the song. They explained that this justified why they would sometimes use a beat where only the chorus was pre-recorded on the track. This difficult process of both maintaining an interactive quality and a professional technical delivery meant that some of the hip-hop artists chose to abandon using a beat and prioritised the oral quality of the performance. Ulizwi found the beat so distracting that he preferred to perform his tracks as spoken-word poetry. Sometimes he played his mbira, a traditional African thumb piano, as a “beat” to his tracks. As a poet well known for his complex wielding of an obscure isiXhosa dialect, Ulizwi’s status did not, however, depend on technical skills and was rooted in his isiXhosa language competence.

Mobile phone networking and integrating into the community of practice

Mobile phone networking allowed artists from other towns to locate Grahamstown’s hip-hop community, so creating an online entry point for hip-hop artists to incorporate themselves into the local community of practice. Through inserting themselves in an online “Network Society”, hip-hop artists could potentially create flexible formations connecting global space (M. Castells, 2010, p. 4), linking them to a global hip-hop community. However, while there were a few who did so, as in the example with Retaliation and Nova described above, most only connected with others in the region. Many of the artists used *Facebook* to find other artists when they moved into a new space. Azlan had moved to Grahamstown from Port Elizabeth. He had lived in Grahamstown for a while before he made contact with the

community face to face, but had been actively posting his music in Grahamstown *Facebook* groups. When he attended his first cypher, he was introduced to local hip-hop leader XNasty, only to find that he was recognised from his *Facebook* postings: “I know this Azlan from *Facebook*,” XNasty announced when they met. Azlan’s online presence therefore gave him a claim to belonging in the Grahamstown CoP, which was legitimated through senior hip-hop head XNasty.

When hip-hop artists travelled around the region, they also connected through *Facebook* with local hip-hop communities and fans from other cities. They found that this was much easier than sharing a phone number. If you had a stage name that was distinct and you made sure people remembered that name and that it was part of your *Facebook* name, anyone could easily find your page through an internet search. In Grahamstown, *Facebook* names were often quite long because they combined their real names with their stage names so that both those who knew them in their personal lives as well as their fans could easily find them. This frequently led to “context collapse” (Marwick & others, 2011) where posts about personal issues sometimes became difficult to differentiate from hip-hop lyrics. More sophisticated hip-hop artists had separate *Facebook* artist pages with only the crew name, and such pages frequently linked to a *Reverbnation* page. A *Facebook* profile could therefore also attest to a hip-hop artist’s level of professional presentation, and managing this involved being careful not only about what you posted yourself, but what others posted on your page. As mobile *Facebook* privacy settings for who could post on your page were difficult to access (Walton, 2014), such professionalisation meant keeping a careful watch over one’s page.

Zion: I like to keep my *Facebook* professional. So, you don’t just post anything there – I delete it! Because I have my specific kind of content that I want people to see when they go to my *Facebook*. If you gonna put like your maybe half-naked photo there and tag me – delete! And maybe delete you too in my *Facebook*! Cause there are people who just upload the porn and put it there. Delete those people and delete their porns! (Personal communication, 15 August 2014).

Mobile social networks allowed hip-hop artists such as Dezz, who was responsible for the organisational aspects of marketing his crew’s music and organising events, to extend the crew’s social relations through creating social networks. *Facebook* was the ubiquitous social network, and was increasingly becoming a network where hip-hop artists could expect to find

their family. Hence Dezz and his crew knew that they had to use *Facebook* because “elder people like *Facebook*”, even though they preferred to communicate between themselves and their younger fans through *WhatsApp*. They had to use *Facebook*, they said, because their “aunties are there”, and they wanted them to support their nephews by buying tickets to events and promoting their music to their friends. Different social networks had specific publics and meanings with which they were associated, and thus invoked different notions of status (boyd, 2011b; Miller & Horst, 2012). *WhatsApp* in Grahamtown’s townships seemed to have a high status, as it was a way of marking those with more sophisticated phones, which meant that a person was either from a higher social class, or older. This was because sophisticated phones were more common among out-of-school young men who had received an upgraded phone at the ceremony celebrating their initiation into Xhosa manhood. When Zion Eyes acquired a more sophisticated phone, he was particularly struck by how, when he installed *WhatsApp*, everyone who also had it did not need to be manually added, but had their faces automatically appear in his list of *WhatsApp* contacts as their phone numbers were recognised by the *WhatsApp* system. This suggests how *WhatsApp* may become a mark of distinction, marking one as part of a select group. While one could use *Facebook* on a public computer at the library, *WhatsApp* meant that you had to actually own a sophisticated phone, so giving it such status.²² Many of the hip-hop artists expressed a preference for *WhatsApp* as a chat site application. Given the fact that the *WhatsApp* friend always belonged to a known phone number, it was not associated with deception and illicit affairs, which tainted *MXit*, which at the height of its popularity had been a frequent source of moral panics (Chigona, Chigona, Ngqokelela, & Mpofu, 2009). Some of the younger hip-hop heads, who had more basic phones, admitted they were still using *MXit* in 2014, but immediately qualified it with “only for the quizzes,²³ of course”. Quite a few refused to use *MXit*, which was associated with sexual affairs, out of commitment to their girlfriends, and preferred communicating using *WhatsApp* on their older brother’s phone.

Their use of social networks was complicated by the fact that their phones were constantly being stolen. As their *WhatsApp*, *Facebook* and *Gmail* accounts were all tied to their mobile phone numbers, this presented several difficulties. While it was possible to reclaim one’s phone number through a SIM swap with the network, many of the hip-hop

²² *WhatsApp* can be used on a computer, but to do so one needs to have it installed on a nearby smartphone.

²³ *MXit*, now *MXit Reach*, is a chat application which has recently expanded the educational services offered by the platform and now hosts several quizzes for revising school work.

artists struggled going through the elaborate and relatively costly SIM swap procedure and simply bought a new SIM when they lost their phones, which resulted in a new phone number. This meant that they had to get a new *WhatsApp* identity and so lost all their old conversations and contacts, and they struggled to retrieve their *Facebook* or *Gmail* accounts when they lost their passwords, as this generally required access to messages for resetting the password sent to their old phone number. Theft thus complicated their “digital personhood” and meant they could not fulfil the expectations which have now become part of ownership of such digital profiles (Lee, Goede, & Shryock, 2010). It became particularly difficult to contact CashSmizzo, for example, since he had lost multiple phones and there were now three *WhatsApp* profiles for him on my phone.

Mobile social networking sites allow belonging in the hip-hop community of practice, and the acquisition of increased legitimacy as hip-hop artists increased their fan base. Such notions of belonging are, however, complicated when hip-hop artists lose their digital personhood and thus one of the means to enter these spaces.

Conclusion

This chapter has conceptualised hip-hop in Grahamstown as a community of practice, which engages in a joint endeavour of not just producing hip-hop, but also transforming young people to resist a violent lifestyle. This allows for a better understanding of how changes in subjectivity are fashioned through processes of socialisation and a sense of belonging in the hip-hop community. Much of this chapter has focused on the cypher as a site of such socialisation. It has shown how the cypher is particularly accommodating in welcoming young men as newcomers to hip-hop because it is focused on the transformation of masculinity. This explains why young women do not often become involved. The important face-to-face socialisation that occurs in the cypher is valued by hip-hop heads, who question those who avoid it and only work in recording studios and then distribute their work online. In the cyphers, the political message of “conscious” hip-hop, as well as requests for technical quality, expressed as appeals to professionalism, are promoted. In future chapters, the tension between the cypher, the hip-hop studio and the cypher will be explored further.

This chapter has also shown how the mobile phone allows hip-hop artists to become involved in legitimate peripheral digital practices such as rehearsals, collecting beats, stage performances and makeshift recordings. The mobile phone thus allows for an entry point from which to start a trajectory towards participation in digital practices central to hip-hop,

such as producing. In Grahamstown, the gradual acquisition of various mobile practices conveys a sense of progress, and the attaining of new levels of status and belonging in the local hip-hop community. Mobile phone practices may be defined as “professional” and so create a sense of greater legitimacy for the hip-hop artist and reaffirm the ideal hip-hop identity of the artist-entrepreneur. Mobile phone networking may make Grahamstown hip-hop artists more aware of themselves in relation to remote hip-hop groups. Thus the relationship between the social and the technological was dynamic, as a mobile phone incorporated into various hip-hop practices instilled these with new meanings, while various mobile practices also become meaningful through hip-hop culture (See Horst & Miller, 2006). The mobile phone allowed a sense of belonging not only through gradual mastery of these practices, but also through the use of social media, where one could interact not only with the local CoP, but also with hip-hop artists in remote towns. Furthermore, hip-hop artists could also start building their own fan base, so creating another basis for status in this CoP.

In the next chapter, I explore the digital backyard studio, a space more conducive for digital skills learning than the cypher, where hip-hop artists could develop complex computer-based skills over an extended period of time. It was not as competitive a space as the cypher, and was often defined by metaphors related to the family, where crew emphasised communal sharing, thus suggesting the importance of African personhood (Gyekye, 1998) for understanding this space. However, while it was defined through such caring relations, hip-hop artists also competed for legitimacy by showing off their abilities in terms of digital practices, something I choose to describe as “digital distinction”. Thus this chapter’s focus on communities of practice will be extended throughout the rest of the dissertation to build on the argument which shows that in following a trajectory of gradual digital skills acquisition, hip-hop artists experience a sense of progress and belonging in the hip-hop community and relate this to their own potential for social mobility in broader society.

Chapter Six: The hip-hop producer and the backyard studio computer

This chapter describes the hip-hop backyard studio, where young people gather to work for hours on a second-hand computer with mixing software. In this chapter I focus on various studio-based practices such as recording, mixing, beat-making, digital image manipulation and video production. Such activities are led by producers: those who have access to computers with sophisticated media software and microphones, and the skills to use these for hip-hop media production. This chapter's contribution is a description of the digital media ecology of the backyard bedroom hip-hop studio and its digital devices. It argues that the space of the backyard studio is infused with meanings that are related to both traditional African personhood (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998) and neoliberal notions of the person as enterprise (N. Rose, 1990). It further argues that this space forms an important part of the Grahamstown hip-hop community of practice, where young people could find both artistic and technical ways to improve their status and legitimacy. Learning in the backyard studio is social, as in any CoP, and here the trajectory of skill development enables a process of "digital distinction", where producers can distinguish themselves from others through their aspiration towards professional music standards. This notion of professionalism is a value of the CoP to which everyone aspires. However, achieving central belonging is gendered. As women are not as tightly integrated into existing male friendship networks and further excluded by the intimate spatial arrangements of the backyard bedroom studio, this makes it difficult for them to become part of learning practices or take up central positions as "masters" in the CoP in terms of digital production skills.

Ownership of a computer is here conceptualised in terms of the mobile phone and its affordances, and imbued with meanings related to modernist notions of success and progress, as well as traditional notions of sharing originating in notions of African personhood. The sharing culture in the backyard studio arguably operates like a type of "commons" among crew members, where membership means sharing digital and other material property, allowing all members of the crew access to the computer. Here the crew is exposed to constant computer breakages, which promotes understanding of the fragility of things, or "broken world thinking" (Jackson, 2014, p. 221), and therefore also invites them to embrace a repair culture. Innovation and learning here is thus also situated in a shared culture of repair and making-do, not only in productivist imaginings of creating media. Despite the backyard studio's promotion of a culture of digital learning, this focus on technical learning meant that

it did not promote political socialisation to the extent that the cypher did. Senior heads were therefore concerned that the studio may actually threaten the sense of belonging and shared values that underpin the CoP. The recording of a track meant that performance was reified and lost its interactive quality, and the studio-bound rapper missed out on important spaces of socialisation, such as the cypher. They fear this may allow a new generation to emerge that do not hold the values of conscious hip-hop. Transforming the performance into a digital product, however, serves an important function in that it could now be shared and traded, so objectifying its creator into itself and offering many more opportunities for meaning-making and spreading the message of conscious hip-hop. Such distribution networks will form the basis of the next chapter. Transcendence of place not only occurs in distribution, but within the actual recording process itself, enabling remote collaboration with other hip-hop communities, promoting innovative practices and an expanded sense of identity.

The first hip-hop studios in Grahamstown's townships were set up around 2007, and before that hip-hop artists had to rely on white producers in town if they wanted to record their tracks. Political economy theories of the media stress that ownership of the means of production has a direct impact on media content (Golding & Murdock, 2000). This was indeed the case in Grahamstown hip-hop. White producers, who owned the first studios, did not always share a vision of what hip-hop should be with township artists. For example, when he was still at school, Main Event recorded at a studio run by DJ Skinny, a white boy from another school. Skinny was not part of the "conscious hip-hop" movement, and visualised commercial success through songs that seemed quite frivolous to the black hip-hop artists. He insisted that their first recorded track would be around the concept of the "Ladies Man", and no matter the protestations of the rappers, he would not be persuaded. It was either that, or he would refuse to record them. Back in the township, other hip-hop artists like Zion Eyes were shocked to hear these rappers rehearsing the chorus for "Ladies Man" and adamant that they would never visit the recording studio if it promoted such crass commercialism. Nevertheless, Zion Eyes' curiosity overcame him and he accompanied Main Event to Skinny's house. At this point, several of the young black rappers had learnt to master the studio software at a basic level. During his visit, Zion Eyes recorded his well-known track "*Bubomi Bam*" (This is my life) while Skinny was in the toilet. He was sure that Skinny would not approve of it, as it was about poverty and hardship, and did not fit with his commercial tastes. It was for this reason that the track had a very simple beat and no layering of different vocal tracks, as it was literally recorded on the fly. With encouragement from the other rappers, Zion Eyes managed to have sufficient focus to record the entire track in one take, before Skinny returned to the

computer. This illustrates how, despite the power of ownership to control content in the white studio, hip-hop artists were still able to apply their resistance tactics to trespass and poach (De Certeau, 2011/1980) and create music on their own terms. This chapter examines how township-based studios function not only to enable hip-hop artists to produce content informed by their values, but also to promote a culture of technological learning and innovation born out of necessity.

6.1 The digital yard – creating a new sense of personhood with technology through a community of practice

Combining African and neoliberal personhood

All the township hip-hop studios visited were bedroom studios, where the artist used personal space for music production, a common practice among South African hip-hop artists (Pritchard, 2011) and the global hip-hop community (Bennett & Peterson, 2004; Harrison, 2014; Watson, 2014). A hip-hop artist with a computer in his backyard room could transform it into a “studio” if he had a microphone and could run the right software. In Grahamstown townships, young men’s bedrooms were generally informal structures in the backyard of the family home. These could be built of prefabricated cement bricks, but most rooms were made combining old ways of weaving traditional “wattle-and-daub” structures from wattle sticks, mud and cow dung with the modern township, all-purpose building material: corrugated iron. While the backyard bedroom with its makeshift appearance may appear to the outsider as a structure of inferior status to a room inside the small brick house, here it is coveted and has come to symbolise both adult manhood and notions of progress.

Retaliation: Toe ek van die bos af kom, toe ek van die initiation skool af kom, toe moes ek uit die huis uit, dit is nou in my culture in, as ‘n man, ek kan nie saam met my ouers in een huis bly nie. Soos ek moet my kampie nou skuif...agtertoe. Dis ‘n fondasie na ‘n verdere stap. So ek sal seker ‘n hok bou met die gedagte dat ek wil vorentoe gaan, en ek wil môre en oormôre, wil ek try om my lewe in daai hok in groter te bou. Sodra jy kan elektrisiteit in 'n shack kan kry, kan jy enige iets anders in daai shack in bou. Want die future of die technology van vandag, dit het so omgechange dat ons bring dit in enige plek in. Ouers is bly om te sien as jy ‘n TV en ‘n DVD en al daai goeters het. Dan dink hulle mos “Nee, my kind vorder” (Personal communication, 24 Aug 2015).
(When I came from the bush, from the initiation school, I had to move out of the house, that’s what my culture says as a

man, I can't live with my parents in the house. So, I moved my things to the backyard. It's a foundation to a next step. So, I would build a shack with the idea that I'm progressing, tomorrow and the day after I will build my life larger in that shack. As soon as you install electricity you can bring anything into that shack. The future of technology has changed so that we can take it anywhere. Parents are happy to see if you have a TV or DVD player and all that stuff. Then they think "My child is progressing".)²⁴

Not everyone waited until initiation, and a young man could move out in late teenage years when he started developing his own social life since it was no longer appropriate to be "knocking on the door of the big house" late at night. The mothers, who generally head families here, had little authority in stopping their sons from going out and facing crime and violence in the streets and the taverns, so they often tried to make his backroom as welcoming as possible. Thus, parents might invest in digital media, often second-hand items, such as music centres, televisions and even computers, to keep their boys at home. During the young man's initiation ceremony into manhood he could receive more technological gifts, such as a new mobile phone or television, gifts which will be accompanied by words of advice from elders about his new responsibilities. In this way the appropriation of technology into the backyard is rendered meaningful and takes on the value of the social space (Silverstone et al., 1992) as it becomes associated both with progress and with responsible manliness rooted in a communal sense of African personhood. African culture, originating in large social groupings with little variation in class, has traditionally promoted large social networks of kin where face-to-face relationships are highly valued (Gluckman, 1970, pp. 78, 95). African personhood is described as a dynamic process of constructing the self as a socially accountable person, where one builds oneself up through accumulating "wealth in people" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, p. 270).

In the backyards of Grahamstown, it was important for young men to tie such social wealth to the space of the family, to the yard. Snezz explained that, particularly for young men who have gone through the manhood initiation ritual, socialising in the yard as opposed to the street corner was part of honouring traditions and family. In their male initiation ritual in the "bush" they had learnt from the elders that it was only "ba-tsotsi" or thugs who socialised on street corners and that as a man, "everything you do should be done at home". It

²⁴ Translation by author, who shares a first language with the interviewee.

was in these backyard studios that hip-hop artists spent many hours together and described themselves as “belonging to the studio’s yard”. Such backyard socialisation in Xhosa town society has a long history (Bank, 2011), but hip-hop artists here were creating new “rhythms of the yards” that replaced network-building, traditional male, beer-drinking rituals²⁵ with those of digital production and consumption.

At the same time as the backyard room becomes a studio, the hip-hop artist transforms into a producer. The coveted title of producer is conferred on those who are able to make a digital instrumental track or “beat” or who are able to record a rapper’s voice on top of such a beat and mix it down into a track. The new producer would give his studio a name, such as “Balisto Productions”, and other hip-hop artists would then no longer refer to it as his bedroom but call it by its studio name, e.g. “I used to record at BBF Music” or “I’m going to Darkie Yam Studios tomorrow”. The meanings attributed to the backyard studio are thus also infused with neoliberal notions of branding and entrepreneurship. These are combined with modernist notions of progress and professionalism.

Zion Eyes: It doesn’t matter to us how professional is the studio...What matters to us is the message that we have to deliver to the people. It is quality that we will have when we record this. ‘Cos we start with things that are not professional and we make them professional. That’s what we about (Personal communication, 11 April 2014).

Zion Eyes was responding to my concern about the low-quality Skype headset microphone he was using to record at BBF studios, and expressing his confidence that the recording would nevertheless be good. Here Zion Eyes was setting out how professionalism is tied on the one hand to recognised institutions with quality technical resources, which the hip-hop artists do not possess due to their class position, while professionalism also means skilled competence and dedication to society, which they could indeed confidently claim. Here the studio and professionalism may thus become a metaphor for the broader process of social mobility: the one who does not start off from privilege can still progress towards status through effort and the right skills. BBF studio, which was Busta’s backyard bedroom studio, was modest in appearance. The mud and wattle walls were painted bright pink with a single window and a corrugated iron roof and Busta’s aunt had personally plastered the cow dung

²⁵ Traditional Xhosa beer drinking rituals are spaces of order and male sociability where a nutritious low-alcohol sorghum beer is consumed over an extended period of time along with conversation.

floor after they built the shack. The studio was dominated by a large bed with a purple duvet, on which the crew draped themselves while Busta worked on his computer on the plastic table, the mouse on his thigh. Another broken computer took up space beside the table. The keyboard was tucked on a ledge on the wall that also held the hi-fi and speakers through which the sound was playing. There was a wooden cupboard on the side on which there was a box full of old computer parts and a screwdriver. On the wall the only decoration was a certificate for being a peer educator from Busta's school days. In the yard Busta's sisters were minding children, sweeping and hanging washing, while young men from the neighbourhood, who were probably not subject to as many chores as their sisters, sauntered into the yard to catch the latest release of the studio in progress.

These hip-hop studios, despite their humble appearance, constituted dreams of progress because of the digital technology. Azlan, for example, had always dreamed of being a full-time producer, and at the start of the study had recently given up his job as a clerk. He had used his former salary to buy a computer, mixing desk, and high-quality condenser microphone. Over the next year, despite being known for his quality recordings, he increasingly spoke of his struggle to survive. The local hip-hop artists just did not have that much disposable cash, no matter how desirable the product was. Despite the material realities of Azlan's lack of commercial success, he believed that things had to get better because he was constantly improving his computer skills. Here the computer was invested with meanings of future success, entrepreneurship and efficiency. In this way the computer facilitated the "expansive realisation" (Miller & Slater, 2000, p. 10) of the person the hip-hop artist could be if they had the chance – a working professional and successful entrepreneur.

The remixing of identity in the backyard shack was perhaps most evident in the creation of branded images to promote hip-hop crews. Many of the producers had taught themselves to use sophisticated image manipulation software such as Photoshop, Photoshape, Inkscape, Photofilter, Photoshine and CorelDraw. This was used to create "cool" images where they applied various filters to photographs of hip-hop artists and wrote on the image with various typefaces. Among the Grahamstown hip-hop artists, images would generally include the crew, often wearing some type of African dress, in front of a township structure such as a wall, with writing superimposed. One could interpret such images to foreground belonging – belonging to the crew, but also belonging to the township, and the solidarity to the space or as they say in hip-hop "representing the 'hood". African styles were frequently combined with nature images to create a "spiritual" traditional feel. They would also often

undertake poses that referenced their intellect. For example, one of the hip-hop artists created an image of himself where his head had turned into a lightbulb.

Some of the artists also created “memes”, pictures with witty text, which were designed to be shared on social media or through MMS. Words showed me a meme he and XNasty had created to “improve people’s consciousness”. It featured a conversation between a tree and an electricity pole, wherein the tree reminds the pole that she is his mother, and that he should not forget this, but the pole can only respond in robot fashion “I must control”. Words explained it had lost its soul and the meme was a humorous way of reminding people not to abandon their roots and was thus a black consciousness message. Here the pole has lost connection to others, the basis of being a person in African personhood, and has thus suffered “social death” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001). Branded with the logo of the Fingo Festival, they were hoping that people would share the meme, thus promoting both the message and the Fingo Festival brand. Through these memes, they asserted their own sense of entrepreneurial industry, while rooting this in an African morality that valued communal links and Xhosa customs.

6.2 Community of practice in the yard – learning through people

In this process of redefining themselves, hip-hop artists were immersed in a learning process, and in the backyard studio such learning was focused on developing technical computer skills. Here, just like in the cyphers, hip-hop artists would learn through observing others, and gradually become involved in these practices. As in other communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) this learning was motivated by shared values, conscious hip-hop values of skill, innovation and a positive orientation to the self and the community. Conceptualising hip-hop as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) explains the extraordinary dedication these young people display to learning digital skills since such learning is not simply about learning another technique, but is embedded in taking on the values of the community and becoming a member, and thus deeply meaningful and part of a process of identity performance. As in other CoPs, knowledge was acquired socially (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Most of this learning did not involve books or tutorials and while it relied on an individual’s initiative to learn, it was not “self-taught” in the sense of learning on your own, hip-hop artists stressed, but a better term would be “learning through people”. For the members of the crew, this entailed observing and interacting with their producer, and in turn the producer would learn from other producers with more experience.

Hip-hop artists quoted the black consciousness slogan “Each one, teach one”, to highlight the responsibility those with knowledge had in sharing it, but also emphasised the agency of the younger hip-hop heads, and their responsibility to practise what they had learnt for this learning to have any impact. Suffocate explained how he would spend a lot of time playing around with his software when he first acquired his computer, and if he could not figure something out, he would walk around from studio to studio asking other producers. This was why he described his learning process as learning “by walking around”. Here searching for knowledge was a pedestrian practice, and knowledge sources were not primarily located in media, but embodied in people. There was an extraordinary awareness of the social nature of learning and hip-hop artists arguably conceptualised knowledge acquisition in terms of African personhood, as “wealth in people”, which was built up through constantly tending relationships with knowledgeable people (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001). This kind of knowledge acquisition particularly makes sense in the context of predominantly oral African cultures.

Learning “through people”, instead of following a systematic curriculum, did have its weaknesses. It meant that hip-hop artists could develop extraordinary competence in a particular software package, but still miss some of the most basic functions. While Azlan was very competent in making Photoshop posters with all sorts of effects, brushes, typographies and edits, he only became aware of the concept of layers after he attended a workshop that I organised. Given that the ability to use layers is one of the most fundamental principles of all but the oldest versions of the software, this seemed quite significant. This example therefore illustrates the “blank spots” that may appear in an insular community where everyone learns information from each other.

Despite this reliance on “learning through people”, a few of the more experienced producers did use the internet for learning. New technology, to a much greater extent than the established craft industries studied by Wenger and Lave (1999), depend on constantly keeping up with new developments. Therefore, being a master in this space means to be constantly immersed in learning, acquiring learning that is not available through local face-to-face networks. Internet-based learning allowed them to cultivate advanced skills, and relied on the ability to do focused searching. Ongidaru was a skilled producer who was known for borrowing a phone from a crew member and using it to google something. His crew members Dezz and Snezz were amused that, unlike other crew members, he would not borrow their phones to browse their photographs or *Facebook* feeds, but did so only to google technical information. This focus on online searching distinguished Ongidaru, but also made

him a highly skilled producer, and his skills had become so much in demand that he had left for Johannesburg to work as a producer there. The other crew members were also not skilled with using *Google* – “We google Dezz!”, they joked, referring to how they were “learning from people”, in this case from their new producer, Dezz. Online knowledge not only emerged from searches, but from online relationships. Azlan was *Facebook* friends with beat-makers based in the UK and USA, and he regularly interacted with them when he had difficulties with his software. He was amazed that he could virtually transport these people to his backyard shack and it felt like they “are sitting here, in my chair, in *Facebook*”, he marvelled. Hip-hop producers also relied on local people with bandwidth to help them access information online that was unaffordable in terms of data, such as training videos. Hip-hop artists therefore recognised the need to extend their learning beyond their own circles, but always understood such knowledge to move through them back to other members of the community of practice.

Women outside the learning trajectory of belonging/recognition

As the community of practice was based around redefining male identity in this space, female hip-hop artists struggled to find a place in the trajectory to becoming a “master” or producer. While Bliss felt comfortable on stage, she often found male banter about technology too competitive and alienating. She was not keen to spend time learning from young men in the studio, because she felt uncomfortable about putting herself in a position of being indebted to young men for teaching her technical skills, and speculated that this may make them feel that she owed them favours. This was why she preferred to learn from a female friend, and had chosen to enrol in a technical course at a nearby college where she could learn “all by herself”. Given the close and crowded conditions in the backyard studio filled with male bodies, one may well understand such reluctance to become part of the group as young women policing their actions in terms of social mores, to protect their sexual reputation in the community, where a lack of such reputation could invite unwanted sexual advances (Erasmus, 2001; Jewkes & Sikweyiya, 2013). In my regular visits to seven hip-hop studios I only ever encountered a young woman once. She was a singer waiting to be recorded on a track, and while she waited for the producer to prepare the computer, she was clearly very uncomfortable. She isolated herself from the banter between male crew members lying on the bed and couch by sitting apart on one corner of the bed and listening to music through her large headphones, swaying her head to the beat while looking down at the floor, constructing

a form of “mobile privation” (Du Gay et al., 2013) to construct a separate private space for herself.

Due to these spatialised gender dynamics, and possibly also due to their large set of chores as daughters and single mothers to young children, young women were therefore not fully able to insert themselves into the social space of learning of the backyard studio, nor to fully benefit from the socially situated learning that happen in this community of practice. There were some young men that recognised such gender dynamics and actively tried to challenge them. XNasty stressed that their crew always tried to create a political space in the recording studio where young women were treated seriously as fellow artists and did not feel that they were being approached as potential girlfriends. They were there because they needed to learn. It was in XNasty’s studio that Great Young Star first became exposed to digital technology as a young teenager. She credits her learning to XNasty, whom she describes as a “free man”. This was because he never doubted her potential to learn the software, and encouraged her to play around with his keyboard and mouse. From there she developed a fascination for computers, learning how to repair them. This empowering attitude was regrettably not that common. In the township here, Great Young Star explained that it was common for people to think that young women couldn’t achieve much.

Great Young Star: People are like: “A woman can fix the computer? *Hayi, man!* (No ways, man!)” You know those people, they keep talking, you know, bad stuff about womens. But I’m strong, you know, I’m a woman and this is what I do. And I wish to expand in life with it (Personal communication, 22 August 2014).

Despite her confidence, Great Young Star was still somewhat constrained in her gender role, as she had adopted a Rastafarian lifestyle a few years ago. Her religion valued modesty in women, which meant that performing on stage or in a music video would be seen as inappropriate by the elders. She therefore retired as a rapper, but still ran her own computer repair business and expressed herself creatively through making digital beats. This illustrates the power of gender roles, but also the ability of women to construct agency for themselves outside the public domain despite these restrictions (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001). Great Young Star was single – her boyfriend, father of her little girl, had passed away a few years ago. It was from him that she had learnt most of the advanced computer repair skills, watching him as he trained for a diploma in computer repair. In some ways, Great Young Star’s Rasta dress of a modest long skirt and head wrap arguably allowed for her

sexual reputation not to be questioned while she expressed agency in running her repair business with a male assistant. She had trained this assistant herself, and recently also recruited another young woman to learn from her. Here Great Young Star had become a “master” in her backyard due to her advanced computer repair skills, showing it was possible for a community of practice based on digital practices in the township to form around a woman. Here, though, this CoP was not established around hip-hop, but around running the repair business.

In the hip-hop CoP, it seemed more difficult for young women to claim the master status and its associated legitimacy. Bliss explained that she had shared some of her design skills with Azlan, however, in the end she said, she discovered he was “better than” her at Photoshop and was doubtful if she had actually taught him anything. Nevertheless, in a subsequent interview Azlan attributed all his Photoshop knowledge to these learning interactions, which illustrates how young women may underestimate their technical skills and not envisage an important role for themselves in training. A central place or “master status” in a CoP is conferred through legitimation by the group, and while there was plenty of legitimation for Bliss as a member who was no longer a newcomer, this seemed not to be extended sufficiently for her to feel entitled to claim a “master” status in teaching interactions.

Digital distinction in the yard

In a community of practice, members gradually learn more skills, and move from peripheral practices to more complex central practices that have more legitimacy to finally achieve master status (Wenger, 2010, pp. 133–134). This creates different claims to centrality in the hierarchy of belonging. Among hip-hop and aspirant producers, their trajectory was linked to the mastery of particular equipment and digital skills that allowed producers to distinguish themselves and claim higher levels of “professionalism” that incurred more legitimacy. This type of “digital distinction” was evident in discussions between hip-hop artists in a number of ways. Producers distinguished themselves by claiming a greater awareness of the skills needed to avoid distortion and noise on a track. They also did so by learning complex musical beat-making skills, distinguishing themselves from producers who could only record and mix. The digital materiality of the media file (Leonardi, 2010) allowed an ephemeral performance to become concrete, so hip-hop artists were able to count their progress to success in terms of the number of tracks they had recorded, or the number of downloads each

track had received. The highest status digital good was the music video, which was recognised as a key milestone on the way to success. Digital distinction was also claimed through ownership of gear. Producers who owned high quality condenser microphones, mixers and digital sample packs of instruments not available on the default beat-making software were considered more professional. The most admired producers were able to sell the beats they created, and Grahamstown producers were particularly in awe of Adon Geel, a Port Elizabeth-based producer who used sound padding to limit noise, used real records instead of electronic MP3 files for sampling, and who had actually applied for sample clearance from commercial record companies for the musical samples he used since his tracks were played on mainstream radio. This notion of levels of professionalism and levels of legitimacy arguably inspired hip-hop artists to extend their own abilities, and constantly improve their technical skills.

In Grahamstown studios, hip-hop producers would often claim authority on the basis of such professionalism. In Rymgees' studio, he had limited authority as a producer due to his limited knowledge of the software, and he would often be shouted down by his crew, offering contrasting opinions on how the recording should proceed. Azlan in contrast, who was known as a very professional producer, demonstrated a quiet authority over the recording process, which would generally be punctuated by brief instructions from him as producer. For the Imin'esidenge crew, authority and legitimacy were not only dictated by professionalism, but also by the hierarchy of age that characterised their concept of African personhood (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998). While most other crews were made up of peers who had started rapping as friends, Imin'esidenge had added to that formula by recruiting several much younger teens into their crew. In their studio they had wired a sound cable from the corrugated iron ceiling and would attach the microphone when recording. I observed how the younger rappers in the group had to stand on tiptoe to get in line with the microphone after older and taller crew members had set it up. When an older but quite short rapper had to record some lines at the end of the track, the producer adjusted the microphone cable to reach down so that the microphone was at the correct height, demonstrating the rapper's higher status. In terms of African personhood, knowledge is built through experience and located in older people, and the Imin'esidenge crew showed how this sometimes created aberrations in the standard CoP model which aligned status and belonging purely with specialised skill levels.

6.3 Meanings of ownership and sharing in the yard

A yard computer, not a home computer

Nafus and Tracey (2002) show that mobile phone ownership in the UK is conceptualised as an individualised independence outside of any obligation to family, thus related to a highly individualised British notion of personhood. Nafus and Tracey (2002) use the domestication approach (Silverstone et al., 1992), an approach which conceptualises different stages of ownership as rooted in processes of meaning-making, particularly in how the meaning of the device changes as it crosses the division between the commercial space where digital media is produced and the private space of the nuclear household where personhood is constructed. The domestication approach is based on various assumptions related to nuclear families and a clear division between private and public (Silverstone et al., 1992), which may not be that applicable to the hip-hop artists in this study. However, the domestication approach's focus on the meanings of digital ownership are considered particularly useful to understand how the computer here is related to these young people's sense of personhood.

In the domestication approach, how a device is displayed in the home is considered part of the process of appropriation and renders the new object meaningful in terms of the norms and values of the social space (Silverstone et al., 1992). Various studies of how people integrate home computers into their personal spaces, both in the Western world (Haddon, 1992; Lally, 2002; Wheelock, 1992) and more recently in the developing world (Alzouma, 2011; Oreglia, 2013; Rangaswamy, 2007) have emphasised how they are conceptualised in terms of family roles, particularly in terms of an educational tool for children, or a home office for parents. The parents of these hip-hop artists did not, however, have office jobs, and were generally not familiar with computers, and did not lay any claim over the computers their sons (and occasionally daughters) used. The computers here were not conceptualised as tools for education or home offices, but hip-hop artists would describe them as "entertainment centres", and so focused attention on the computer as object of media consumption. Here the computer or "box", as it was commonly referred to, was associated not only with music production, but also with playing games, listening to music and watching films. Retaliation had integrated his computer into the setup for the other entertainment devices. He stacked his screen on top of his DVD player and connected the PC audio outputs to speakers mounted in the corners of the roof. Given their emphasis on their future social mobility, their commitment to learning and entrepreneurship, I was surprised that hip-hop artists did not seem to use their computers for educational or business purposes at all. Many

of the hip-hop artists had very specialised media production software installed on their computers, but seldom owned any office software such as word processors or educational software such as PDF readers. These computers provided a link to the broader world of entertainment. In the backyard, the computer became a point of globalisation within the material constraints of the shack.²⁶ When I first visited Thulz in his shack, I was struck that the whole shack was leaning precariously as the corrugated iron had somehow developed a weakness on the one side. In contrast, his “entertainment centre” was an impressive, neatly stacked tower of devices – playing a blockbuster fantasy movie not yet released in South Africa with prominent Chinese subtitles to a group of young men all huddled on the bed.

Here acquiring a computer is seen as “moving forward” in relation to simply having a phone, or as Retaliation expressed it as he unpacked his computer: “This is my time, this is how I’m going to move forward from here on...I can go to places that my phone couldn’t go”. Acquiring a computer was thus conceptualised in terms of social mobility and modernist notions of progress. These young people had been exposed to the mobile phone and its practices long before encountering computers, therefore, like first-time computer users elsewhere in the Global South (Nemer, Gross, & True, 2013), they saw many of the PC’s features in terms of the mobile phone’s architecture. When Retaliation unpacked the old computer his girlfriend’s family had given him, he held up his new keyboard and spoke of how amazing it was to own such a huge keyboard. Although, of course, he was used to QWERTY keyboards because he had been using a Blackberry for some time, having progressed from the condensed alphanumerical keyboards of basic phones. Here, mobile keyboards were considered the norm, and the PC keyboard an aberration.

As the first point of reference, the mobile phone was used as a basis for comparison with the functions of the computer, and when hip-hop heads first acquired a computer, they tried to acquire the applications that they knew and trusted on the mobile phone. For example, Retaliation contacted me to help him find a copy of *Opera Mini* for his new computer as he had been using it on his mobile phone and liked it very much. *Opera Mini* was popular for a reason, the browser has developed sophisticated technology to compress images on websites before these are downloaded, so creating an exceptionally fast and data-light mobile web browsing experience. Retaliation was keen to try out browsing on the computer while tethered to his girlfriend’s “fancy” *Samsung Galaxy S3* phone, but ended up

²⁶ Township spaces in South Africa have always been immersed in global culture, as urbanised black South Africans embraced popular culture and media from around the world (Ranger, 2010; Strelitz, 2004).

disappointed with the PC version of *Opera* because, unlike *Opera Mini*, it was a lot slower and more data intensive.

Retaliation also tried accessing *Facebook* directly from his computer, and was fascinated that it had a completely different design and was populating the screen with images and advertisements “everywhere you look”. He remembered that the first time he accessed *Facebook* on his phone (probably before the development of the mobile app), it had also looked a bit like this. Retaliation found it very interesting that *Facebook* had now also adapted this “old phone version” for the computer, not realising that it was actually initially developed for the computer screen. Even computer software was found lacking by comparing unfavourably with mobile phone applications. For example, CashSmizzo expressed disappointment at the difficulty of making a photo compilation collage in Photoshop, as it was so much easier on PicMix on his mobile phone. In the digital media ecology, digital technology not only takes on meanings shaped by the terms of reference of the social world (Miller & Horst, 2012), but is clearly also influenced by a history of various digital devices’ appropriation in this social space, and the expectations and practices created around previous devices.

Space was at a premium in the backyard room and there was no place for the mouse or a keyboard on the small shelf or table where the computer screen, sound system and speakers were invariably perched. This, and the fact that media programs were more mouse orientated, meant that keyboards were often tucked away on ledges or stashed near the back of the wall – indeed Thulz’s keyboard had suffered some damage from the mud dripping down the walls of his leaky shack. Hip-hop producers wielded the mouse on a thigh, some even preferring to pull up their trousers to place the mouse on the bare skin. They seemed to have found a way to render a behaviour necessitated by the material constraints of space into a cool, stylish act. This sense of performance was facilitated by the public orientation of the producer as performer in front of the crew, with them looking over (invariably) his shoulder. Unlike the Western households studied by Baillie and Benyon (2008), where computer placing in the home was orientated around privacy, here there was no sense of private digital media spaces. The hip-hop studio computer was thus not really a home computer, in the sense that it was not shared by the family of the house, but rather by the young people of the yard, the artists of the studio. It would thus be more accurate to call it a yard computer than a home computer. In that sense, its concept of ownership was similar to the mobile phone in such spaces, in that while it belonged to one person, friendship sharing cultures meant that anyone

of the friends was free to use it and browse its media at any time (Walton, Haßreiter, & Marsden, 2012).

Interviewer: People call it a personal computer...

Njilo: Hai, abalungu tina (No, white people have that) We don't have personal things. This computer ... I can come here and watch Dezz's pics and listen music. He does the same thing in my place. Yes.

Dezz: So it doesn't get any private or personal or something like that. Because we...we share everything so there's no use for us...or maybe say you can't touch that, that's mine or you can't be here (Personal communication, 14 August 2014).

Njilo specifically identifies this sharing culture in opposition to white culture. Western models of personhood are rooted in the individual. Property belongs to an individual for personal use and access to personal space is regulated by the concept of privacy, which presumes a sort of territoriality or protective bubble around the person (Hirshleifer, 1980; Papacharissi, 2013). This notion of personal space extends to digital devices, which can also help create a sense of privacy in a crowded space, as social rules dictate that others cannot share the personal device (Groening, 2010). In contrast, in African notions of ownership, the device may belong to one person, but that person is compelled to share it on the basis of sustaining a social network of close friends. Such sharing obligations between friends of mobile phones have been noted in townships in Cape Town (Walton et al., 2012). African personhood constructs individualistic Western notions of property as selfish and perverse in its negation of human relationships, and questions its replacement of dynamic sharing relationships with static legalistic paper contracts and deeds (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001). The young men in the yard therefore shared their computer based on the obligations created through close social relations. Before I realised this, I could not understand why Mzi would spend three months learning recording software to record his track at Wise Eyes Studio and then not even have a copy of his own to show for his efforts. He insisted that the track was on the studio computer where his friends were, and that he could play it anytime he wanted to when he went there. Mzi explained that when he was hungry and there was no food at home, he could rely on the fellow artists of his studio, who would always offer him a plate of food. The communal sharing culture was thus reflected in the relationships cultivated around the yard computer, where they shared company, food and digital technology.

This communal sharing culture translated into a certain fluidity of ownership, where digital devices frequently moved from one space to another. Dezz pointed out that he was

using Snezz's speakers, as they blew his speakers playing one of the beats, and the mouse was also not his, but belonged to Njilo. When I visited Lunga to watch him assemble his dance track on his computer, we first had to collect a keyboard from Thulz as his one was broken. During this demonstration, Great Young Star popped in from across the road to collect the mouse she had lent him, but then left again when she realised he was still using it. Such lending of computer parts was necessitated by material constraints, such as broken equipment, but also an example of how digital devices formed part of the sharing obligations created through friendship and the social structure of the crew. In the backyard studio, the meanings of the device and its parts not only change as these move between the private and commercial space of acquisition, the focus of the domestication approach (Silverstone et al., 1992), but also change as they move around in the communal network, producing meanings centred in mutual obligation (Mauss, 1925). Njilo and Snezz expressed the obligation to share hardware in terms of a shared belonging, belonging to the studio.

Snezz: We are brothers, brothers of peace.
Interviewer: You have to share?
Snezz: Ja...ja...the people shall share.
Njilo: This is our home. So we have to build this home (Personal communication, 14 August 2014).

Here sharing is tied to a shared space, the space of the studio, which is conceptualised as a home, thus seated in the idea of family. Hip-hop artists would frequently invoke the metaphor of the family to describe their crew and fans. African personhood is based in the idea of the extended family and a shared lineage which conceptualises communalism in the basis of considering others as akin to family (Gyekye, 1998). It is for this reason that strangers will often be greeted as “brother” or “grandmother”. It is thus qualitatively different from modern notions of sharing based in the idea of the public/private divide, where sharing is based on citizenship and rights to access public goods administered by government. African personhood recognises rights, but places greater emphasis on duties: duties to share with others on the basis of a shared relationship, a relationship based in the concept of the family and the mutual obligations this implies (Gyekye, 1998).

Sharing digital devices, especially mobile phones, is a well-established practice among black South Africans living in townships or rural areas (Bidwell, 2010; Walton et al., 2012). In Grahamstown, a newly initiated man was required to give his old phone to a family member, so showing his commitment to a sharing culture and obligation to family. The

sharing culture in the family also extended to social media use, where younger brothers with basic phones would share their older brother's feature phones to access applications such as *WhatsApp*. Many of the Imin'isidenge crew members relied on their older brothers who were also in the crew to participate in *WhatsApp* conversations about planning performances. A vocalist who performed with CashSmizzo's crew shared her phone with her mother, and had an agreement that she would exclusively use the *Facebook* application on this phone at night, while her mother would use other applications in the day. While these phone sharing practices occurred mainly between family members, in the backyard shack the computer was shared by all crew members.

Various scholars have discussed the notion of sharing in terms of the metaphor of "the commons" (J. Burger, 2001; Hardin, 2009; Ostrom, 2015). The concept of the commons derives from Roman times, in which certain fields, "the commons", were not owned by feudal lords, but were parcels of land on the borders of the settlement available to anyone for cultivation or grazing. In 15th century England, large landowners enclosed these commons, creating a protracted debate over the relative merits of "the commons" and "enclosures". These terms were again mobilised at the onset of the neoliberal era, when Hardin (2009/1968) recalled the medieval landowners reference to the inevitable over-exploitation of a shared resource, or what they called "the tragedy of the commons", to call for new 20th century "enclosures": the privatisation of wilderness spaces. Hardin's (2009) lack of empathy for poor people is clear from his dismissal of human rights and social welfare policies. In response, various scholars have called for the preservation of the commons, either by calling for public management of these resources (Carruthers & Stoner, 1981), or more radically, proposing that users of the commons set up various agreements between themselves to manage such resources (Ostrom, 2015). In some ways we may therefore consider the backyard studio a type of "commons" as it was a space of sharing to which all crew members had access. However, what is qualitatively different from this concept of the "commons" is the notion of sharing based in social relations since it was not just anyone who could access the backyard studio, only those who belonged to it through cultivating such communal ties.

Several scholars have proposed conceptualising the internet as a shared commons, a shared online resource, under threat of commercial interests that are creating a new enclosure of the commons (Haupt, 2008; Kidd, 2003; Schweik & English, 2012). In the wake of such enclosure of the information commons by corporate monopolies, Haupt (2008) illustrates how hip-hop heads outside of the commercial music industry have rejected such enclosure, and have insisted on using the internet as a commons. This is clear from their defiance of

copyright laws to sample snippets of online music and creatively remix these into their own musical beats, which they mix into non-commercial music and again share online (Haupt, 2008). In the Grahamstown hip-hop community, such reclaiming of the internet as a “commons” was evident among hip-hop artists. Some artists who did not have access to producers who were beat-makers simply downloaded a beat from the internet, from a site such as Tubidy.com, and recorded a rap track on it, and then uploaded the new mixed track to the internet. Those producers who were involved in beat-making would use a musical sample from a downloaded track as the main element of the beat, importing it into a software program used for composing, such as Fruity Loops. Here they would re-order snippets of the sample digitally through a process called “chopping” and then adding percussive elements and other instruments. One of the beat-making producers explained this process as “giving life to old music” because he chose samples that reflected the musical memory of his community, old tracks like the Temptations and the Bee Gees that were popular with the township’s older generation. He worked from a hard drive full of downloaded seventies funk to create his sample and imagined people listening to his beats and experiencing a nostalgic familiarity, yet at the same time not being able to place the music, as the digital “chopping” had totally transformed it through this reassembly. Such “chopping” allows a hip-hop producer to hide the origin of the sample used to make the beat, and avoid being detected by copyright claimants (Schloss, 2004). The Grahamstown producer I observed did not seem that concerned about copyright, but was more taken by his own ability to disguise a popular track that reflected the spirit of the neighbourhood. In this way the musical process placed not only emphasis on individual creativity, but also on belonging to the community through a shared culture and musical memory.

Port Elizabeth-based producer, Adon Geel, considered the top regional producer and beatmaker, described himself as a “sound preserver” and saw hip-hop and its sampling tradition as a “slow” way of collecting old harmonies and melodies and fusing them together. He understood this as being very different from the “fast” beat-making traditions of other genres such as gospel, house and mbaqanga, which did not take the time to acquire knowledge about old music, nor to preserve and honour old musical traditions, and he was worried these might be “faded out” by the “fast music” that was taking over the world. Sampling here is thus not only a process of shared memory, but also considered as the production of rooted knowledge, authoring a thoroughly researched new musical work based on a number of musical citations. Hip-hop artists were aware that if they wanted to play their tracks on commercial radio stations, they needed to get sample clearance. Adon Geel would

proudly speak in local workshops of how he applied for sampling clearance because some of his tracks were played on national radio. Thus, sample clearance became another claim to “digital distinction” and to asserting a senior position in the community of practice. However, as the Grahamstown artists, unlike Adon Geel, generally did not distribute their music commercially, they were not particularly aware of the need for sample clearance or of copyright laws related to sampling. As Schloss (2004, p. 176) explains, international copyright laws dictate that every sample needs to be cleared and if a sample is a recognisable composition, publishing rights and mastering rights are due. A sample that has been chopped and rearranged so that it is not recognisable only needs to pay for mastering rights. Grahamstown hip-hop artists used the chopping technique more as an expression of skill, however, than out of a concern for copyright. The Grahamstown hip-hop artists’ approach to copyright was therefore quite pragmatic, based on doing what was necessary to get onto radio, but not on any ethical or moral appreciation of copyright law. According to South African copyright law, if a work is not sold commercially, a vendor cannot be charged for copyright violation (Primo & Lloyd, 2011). Hip-hop artists did not make money from their music, making it questionable that they would be in breach of these laws. However, in general they did not seem to have a clear concept of copyright laws.

Karaganis (2011) points out that international copyright laws have failed to acquire any legitimacy in the developing world, as legal products were generally universally unaffordable. Grahamstown hip-hop artists were also not particularly concerned about the fact that they often used software to which they did not hold copyright. They considered such use to be normal, and did not see it as contradictory to their identity as highly moral people in their community who stood up to crime. As software programs were priced totally out of their range, it was out of the question that these economically marginalised hip-hop artists could ever own a legal copy. In this social space, if someone had a copy of a software program, they were obliged to share it with other hip-hop artists who asked for it, and hip-hop artists would often talk about getting copies of mixing or beat-making software through visits to other studios.

Lessig (2012) questions the ethical basis of copyright law as excessively regulating culture and restricting the ability to participate in creating works based on shared cultural reference points. In an African culture, where sharing is a marker of a person’s humanity and social ties are as important as individual creativity, there is arguably even more of a basis to question such laws. In a Western culture based on individualism, any creative work is considered owned by the individual, based on the notion that the individual is the sole owner

of his or her mind and body, and thus the owner of any products resulting from the body's labour (Strathern, 1996). African personhood provides a communalist model where people are not isolated individuals, but each person is continually produced through the efforts of the community, resulting in related duties to the community (Gyekye, 1998). In terms of intellectual property in particular, the foregrounding of oral culture means that ideas are not considered solely a person's property, but a shared product produced through interaction (Wiredu, 2009).

Nevertheless, while hip-hop tracks were frequently distributed for free, hip-hop artists did not see the music they produced as solely a gift to society, but as a potential product to be sold, from which they could eventually make a living. They were concerned when other people copied their music without their permission, or infringed on what they saw as their "brand". There was thus a contradiction between their sharing culture and entrepreneurial expectations related to being able to sell their tracks. This was not unique to Grahamstown, but characteristic of the global ethics of producers (Schloss, 2004).

6.4 Materiality, repair and the culture of care and innovation in the yard

The genius of making-do

Jackson (2014, p. 227) critiques what he calls the "productivist imaginings" of technology scholarship, which focuses almost entirely on innovation in design and digital production, and tends to ignore the possibility of innovation in maintenance, repair and utilisation of infrastructure. This can arguably be traced to an individualist society, where production, design and innovation are considered seated in the ingenuity of the individual (Strathern, 1996). Instead, Jackson (2014, p. 226) calls for an "ethics of repair", which foregrounds the creativity inherent in repair and maintenance, and evokes the feminist call to an "ethics of care" (Held, 2006). An ethics of care critiques the Kantian individualist model of human morality and instead proposes a morality based in relationships, particularly the relationship between mother and child which places care, attention and communication at the centre of morality (Held, 2006). It thus has some similarity to the notion of African personhood, which despite not being based in feminist principles, also foregrounds morality in human relationships modelled on the family. An "ethics of repair" is based in caring for the material world. Repair and maintenance are essential but largely invisible practices that re-constitute the world every day, and without which society would fall apart, yet they are given very little value (Graham & Thrift, 2007). In the developing world, breakdown and repair are a very

visible component of everyday life, and provide particular opportunities for understanding how people make sense of digital devices (Larkin, 2008). Jackson (2014, p. 221) argues for an approach to ICT that he calls “broken world thinking”, which assumes a fragile world and celebrates the creativity and resilience of repair and maintenance.

Cultures of repair are frequently dependent on parts from “grey markets”, which are ubiquitous in informal economies (Lobato & Thomas, 2014). The “grey” economy is characterised by a blurring between legitimate and blackmarket goods, where one can never be quite sure of the authenticity of any of the products. In the township, this “grey” economy was not located in a specific marketplace, but people would often walk from door to door selling computer hardware. One of the producers showed me a portable modem he had bought from someone who had made these kind of rounds, for a very affordable R50, where it would cost more than four times that in the shops. In the informal “grey” economy of the township, people often did not ask questions when such a good offer came their way, and here second-hand goods, stolen goods and bargains were tricky to tell apart.

Most of the hip-hop artists who owned computers were adept at computer repair and maintenance because their machines were constantly malfunctioning. The digital backyard studio could get very hot, and electricity supply fluctuated, not only because of the inferior electricity infrastructure in the township (Corke, 2014), but also because of the makeshift electricity wiring extensions from the main house. A surge could easily destroy a computer’s power supply, or even worse, its hard drive. Then the producer would not only lose all their software, but also all the music they had made. One group had lost the use of a DSLR camera they had bought after saving up for months because the charger had been stolen and when one of the crew found another charger that fitted, it used a different wattage and promptly destroyed the camera. Hardware that had suffered water damage was particularly difficult to repair. Azlan regretted carrying a hard drive in his backpack because he was caught in an unexpected shower and the hard drive was completely destroyed. Even hardware inside the backyard shack was not safe, as the precarious structure was frequently not waterproof, and water mixed with the mud in the walls to cover computer keyboards in a dirty brown sludge. Such breakages created a culture of Do-It-Yourself ingenuity, where similar to the culture of *jugaad* in the slums of India (Rangaswamy & Densmore, 2013), people were proud of their ability to constantly tinker, learn and fix.

The emergence of this repair culture can to some extent be explained in terms of affordances. Affordances are the range of constraining or enabling factors of a specific technology (Hutchby, 2001). Increasingly, devices are designed so that they cannot easily be

repaired and have to be discarded (Graham & Thrift, 2007). It is, however, those devices that have the affordances to allow for customisation and frequent repair that become popular in communities in the Global South, such as in rural Africa (de Laet & Mol, 2000). While the specialised skills and tools needed to fix mobile phones were outside the reach of hip-hop artists, computer repair, especially of desktops, was facilitated by their affordances of easily opened “boxes”, modular slot design and exchangeable parts. Arguably, what also propelled this repair culture was that the computers were constantly breaking down, driving young people to the necessity of knowing how to fix them.

Jackson (2014, p. 221) credits the development of digital repair cultures in developing countries to people’s knowledge of how things break, which is an important part of what he calls “broken world thinking”. In the hip-hop studio, among a group of young people in a community of practice that values agency and skill, the fragility of the computer thus becomes an affordance for an educational project unplanned by its designers. Driven by the unexpected context of an overheated backyard shack with a surging electricity supply and a leaky roof, the computer constantly invokes “broken world thinking” (Jackson, 2014, p. 221), and becomes a type of “material textbook” demanding its users to read the lessons of repair in its innards. As Hutchby (2001) points out, affordances are not always apparent or singular, and a particular ability or constraint is read off a device in a particular context, while a whole range of other affordances remain illegible in that context. In the backyard studio, it is thus the affordances of the easily opened case, modular design and accessible second-hand parts that partly enable a repair culture, and as a result this context also allows hip-hop artists to “read” the computer as a “textbook” and become repair experts. The hip-hop CoP’s powerful sense of self-worth and agency, the conditions in the backyard and the affordances of the computer therefore invoke “broken world thinking” (Jackson, 2014, p. 221). The role of the computer’s affordances in developing technical skills here is hence an important contribution of this study, and suggests opportunities for further research, especially given the paucity of literature on the personal computer in marginalised communities in the developing world (See Alzouma, 2011; Oreglia, 2013; Rangaswamy, 2007).

Certain hip-hop heads in the CoP developed advanced skills and became service providers for other hip-hop artists, fixing their computers and providing them with parts from other unfixable cannibalised machines. These experts, or “computer heads”, as Retaliation called them, would engage in an “ethics of repair” (Jackson, 2014, p. 226) informed by African personhood (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998), in which they would often assist their “brothers”, other hip-hop artists, with free repairs. Sometimes they would be paid

a nominal amount, such as R50, for a major repair. While the experts were adept at the more advanced skills, such as diagnosing faulty cables or testing RAM, other hip-hop heads in the CoP developed peripheral skills, such as replacing faulty power supplies. Hip-hop artists normally had at least one broken computer that they kept to harvest for spare parts. Tools were limited and they often used an old kitchen knife as a screw driver. Their township computers were different from those in the suburbs, Dezz explained, because they relied on home repairs, and therefore township computers were always “open”; they were never covered with their cases. Great Young Star believed one should always keep your computer “open” so you could keep track of anything that might be taken when another person was using your computer. This suggests there were also some risks attached to the “commons” of the backyard, where the fluid nature of ownership could mean that some took advantage of this arrangement. Sometimes placing a part inside the PC mainframe tower could secure it better. One crew bought a second-hand external hard drive but chose to mount it inside the tower so that they would not be obliged to share it with others, and so avoid infecting it with viruses. If it were plugged in externally they would not be able to refuse sharing it, they said, but such interior mountings limited the shareability of the drive, as it appeared that it was not possible to share it. This example shows how a computer may be modified to subtly avoid some of the obligations of African personhood (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998), and so create a new contextual affordance of “unshareability”.

Part of computer maintenance was formatting hard drives after a virus infection and installing all the software again. As these computers were not directly connected to the internet, it was not usual to have up-to-date virus software. Safeguarding one’s software from the viruses people brought into the backyard on flash sticks and hard drives therefore required considerable ingenuity. Great Young Star had copied her software backups onto four backup disks. She had also mounted all five disks inside her PC tower, but only one was connected – the others were backups, safely unshareable inside her tower. Only one drive was thus vulnerable to power surges, and none of them were “borrowable”. Great Young Star often helped others reinstall their software if they lost their hard drives and her software collection was particularly rare since it contained many copies of old versions. She was very proud that she had saved a copy of VLC 1, while VLC 11 was now the only version available for download. As many of the computers in this environment were old Pentium 2 and Pentium 3 computers with little RAM, they could not run new software that demanded fast processing speed and abundant memory. Reinstalling software was a common maintenance practice here because hip-hop producers often could not troubleshoot software or find ways to restore these

to default settings – frequently, it was easier to simply reinstall the software than to try and fix it. Keeping old versions of software was therefore essential for this digital media ecology which was outside of the logic of the constantly upgraded machine. It was a digital media ecology adapted to an informal economy of second-hand computers.

Such a do-it-yourself culture was evident not only in repairs, but also the tinkering with both hardware and software to explore new ways of customising technology for the specific context. Suffocate, for example, had converted a simple lapel microphone into a standing microphone with some twisted wire and a thick piece of foam as pop filter. Hip-hop artists had also adapted their recording technique for a noisy environment, to eliminate the ubiquitous township sounds of barking dogs or radios constantly blaring in the neighbourhood. They developed a three step workflow for noise reduction by recording the track three times. In the studio, the rapper was instructed to rap “full out” and the microphone levels were turned down to minimise recording any background sounds, including noise. The downside of this technique was that it did not pick up the bass frequencies of the voice due to a technical microphone issue called “bass roll-off” at close range. In order to get a fuller sound with more bass, they then recorded the same section again, but this time the MC was instructed to not rap so loudly and to focus on producing a deep voice. The third “backup” recording was also done at a normal volume and was described as “the punchlines” because here the artist had to focus on the clear pronunciation of the words at the end of each line. All three of these recordings would then be lined up and mixed together, creating a fuller composite with minimal background noise. Innovation also extended to video production. The Imin’esidenge crew did not have a video camera or editing software, but they used a digital still camera to produce music videos, copying these video clips to their computer and editing it with free DVD production software – a complex feat given that such software is only really designed for very simple cutting, such as assembling two bits of a video together and trimming the endings.

6.5 *The virtual studio*

Older hip-hop leaders were particularly concerned that with the spread of hip-hop studios, the socialising influence of the cyphers would diminish as a new generation increasingly spent more time in the studio recording. There were hip-hop artists in Grahamstown, Zion Eyes explained, who one would never see on stage, they would just “record, record, record”. Without the cypher’s socialisation processes of “the beef”, they could never be exposed to the

values of black consciousness. The studio therefore enabled a retreat away from face-to-face public interaction, and the possibility of an isolated individualism where the hip-hop artist simply recorded and uploaded tracks without the benefit of peer feedback in the cypher. Such an orientation towards the virtual world and away from the local was particularly evident in CashSmizzo's studio. When CashSmizzo's mother lost her job as a domestic worker in Knysna, he was sent to stay with extended family in Grahamstown, where he struggled to fit into the local hip-hop scene, but had managed to do some recordings with Busta. In Knysna, hip-hop was much more commercial and orientated towards gangsta hip-hop. CashSmizzo, despite still being a school boy, was taller than most of the other Grahamstown hip-hop artists and liked to portray a bad boy image where he would pout his lips and throw out cool gangster-style hand gestures at an imaginary screen. He could not understand why other hip-hop artists disapproved of the music video in which he performed next to tipsy patrons of the local shebeen²⁷. Towards the end of the study, CashSmizzo was given a second-hand computer by his older half-sister and so established his studio in Grahamstown. The first thing he did was to print out the logo of the studio where he had been recording in Knysna to show that his backroom was a "branch" of this studio. He proceeded downloading beats from the same gangsta hip-hop site they used in Knysna, thus aligning himself, in this virtual space, to Knysna hip-hop. Through the online world and its networked connections to Knysna, CashSmizzo could re-imagine the prestige he enjoyed in that hip-hop scene.

The internet allows for networked connections to develop that transcended the restrictions of place and allow for meetings to occur in the "space of flows" (M. Castells, 2010). Among hip-hop artists, the online networking space became another meeting place, especially among collaborators who had since dispersed to different towns. XNasty compared his *WhatsApp* network to the old studio where he used to hang out with his crew like a family.

XNasty: Now the technology is replicating that, where a community can exist on *WhatsApp*. I can sit in my house, I don't have to visit, we can all be with each other. "Yeah, I'm listening to this song" – record a little bit, and then send – or you can just "like yeah, man" be like my brother who does beats for me, he's in KZN²⁸, he sends me a clip, an audio clip of a track they are planning to record. And I must write – they sent a beat with the chorus – so they're forcing

²⁷ A shebeen is a township pub that sells various alcoholic beverages.

²⁸ KwaZulu Natal, or KZN, is a province of South Africa that borders the Eastern Cape.

me to start writing. And if I like it, I'm really gonna write
(Personal communication, 22 April 2014).

As XNasty points out, what hip-hop artists especially appreciated was *WhatsApp*'s ability to send audio files and record clips directly through the interface. Rymgees was able to create a recording collaboration with another hip-hop artist in Port Elizabeth that he had only met online on a local hip-hop music site. They used *WhatsApp* to transfer MP3s of the various stages of the recordings to each other, so creating a link between two yards in cyberspace. The Port Elizabeth artist sent Rymgees a beat as an MP3 file via *WhatsApp* and then Rymgees recorded the chorus, exported it as an MP3 again and *WhatsApped* it back. The Port Elizabeth artist then recorded his verses on top of this, exported it as an MP3 again and then again sent it back to Rymgees, who added another verse and then mixed and mastered the final song. Rymgees proudly played me the final MP3 track and did not seem to mind the digital artefacts and hiss that had formed as a result of all this compression. He was proud of their technical innovation to overcome distance, which meant he could collaborate with his favourite Port Elizabeth artist, whom he had never met face to face, and so establish himself as someone who works with artists in a big city. Rymgees accepted distortion and noise as part of the normal township hip-hop "sound", in the same way that Nollywood consumers accepted the aesthetic of noise and interference of the bootleg video copy (Larkin, 2008). Lack of media infrastructure in the developing world, in this case the unaffordability of internet data and lack of uncompressed file transfer software, may generate unavoidable noise and distortion in the signal, and so create new norms for acceptable aesthetics for media genres (Larkin, 2008). While many hip-hop artists found such noisy aesthetics acceptable, the most senior producers in the community of practice, such as Adon Geel and Azlan, were highly critical of noisy tracks and distinguished themselves through their audio quality and professionalism. They were very aware of information that is lost through music compression and premixing, and would make a point to prevent this through various methods such as saving beats as many separate instrument tracks, and always saving the AAC file of a recording along with a highly compressed MP3 version for digital distribution. Thus noise quality became another terrain on which digital distinction was performed.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how hip-hop artists in the digital backyard creatively combine notions of the self, based both in communal (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998),

and more individualistic notions of the self as professional (Fournier, 1999; Larson, 2012) and as an enterprise (Makovicky, 2014; Martin, 2000; N. Rose, 1990). These notions of self manifest in practices of sharing, practices of digital distinction to demonstrate professionalism, and a concern with branding and the self as a trademark. The findings further illustrate how learning digital skills can happen very successfully outside of institutions such as schools and ICT centres. The informality and communal nature of these backyard studios may in fact be particular strengths of these learning environments. Learning is not driven by a formal curriculum, but by a burning need to belong and distinguish themselves in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2010), leading hip-hop artists to commit long hours to mastering various techniques. They do not depend on a teacher, as the communal values of the studio compel them to follow the black consciousness slogan of “each one, teach one”. It is, however, difficult for young women to insert themselves in these spaces of digital learning, probably due to the need to perform respectability in order to be accepted in the broader community. The findings suggest the importance of the presence of young men who defy normative gender values and create welcoming spaces for young women in these CoPs to ensure that technical skills may also be developed in female hip-hop artists.

The hip-hop artists make sense of computers in terms of the affordances of their mobile phones, pointing to the importance of order of adoption of digital technology in the digital media ecology. As most of the developing world is constituted of such mobile-first users, this suggests that their adoption of other digital technology may be shaped by initial experiences with the mobile phone. To date, notions of the sharing of digital media and technology, or the “information commons”, has been defined in terms of the peasant sharing cultures of medieval Europe, based on the pragmatic notion of “the public good” (Kidd, 2003). These hip-hop artists, however, conceptualise their sharing practices in terms of traditional African notions of personhood, where sharing is linked to the expression of a basic humanity based in relationships to others and therefore the basis of any moral standing. It is therefore a culture defined by a particularly strong moral compulsion to share, which demands a constant performance of such sharing to demonstrate one’s humanity. Arguably, the non-destructive nature of digital files makes them ideal objects for performing the moral obligation of sharing in circumstances of material hardship because one retains a copy and can still share the same file with many others. The findings point to the need for further research about how people make sense of concepts such as cultural and intellectual property in relation to everyday sharing practices. The normative nature of sharing results in particular

innovations where people change the shareability of devices, such as portable hard drives, so that not sharing such a device no longer incurs moral disapproval. This may be particularly important to designers, who may want to create designs that communicate either shareability or the impossibility of sharing into devices. The chapter has further shown how constant computer breakages in the backyard studio lead to a culture of repair and innovation or “broken world thinking” (Jackson, 2014, p. 221). This repair culture can be linked to broader communal notions of caring and collective ingenuity, illustrating that learning in a CoP is not only driven by belonging and individual legitimacy, but also by a sense of duty to others that results from such belonging.

Finally, the possibility of producing music beyond the confines of the backyard studio and extending collaboration across virtual space raise questions related to the meanings of the networks in which hip-hop artists are positioned. Older hip-hop heads are concerned with the risks of artists dis-embedding themselves from the Grahamstown place-based networks where socialisation into black consciousness ethics takes place. Such concerns question the value of “networked individualism” (M. Castells, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Wellman & Hampton, 1999), for a group actively trying to resist global discourses that devalue the poor black body. Such virtual networks, however, also raise opportunities to connect with a global, politically conscious, hip-hop community. These concerns will be extended in the next chapter, where notions of engaging with “elsewhere” and creating fan communities are explored in more depth.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown how the backyard studio and its practices play an important role in developing digital skills, and how such skills are associated with very particular meanings and values. The hip-hop artists’ material constraints and the affordances of the digital technology also provide creative environments for learning and innovation, to find new ways of doing things. In the next chapter we will see how notions of personhood are enacted in digital distribution practices, and how the constraints of infrastructure and digital materiality both limit practices while also promoting innovation.

Chapter Seven: Distribution of hip-hop media – local and translocal

This chapter argues that among the hip-hop artists in this study, music distribution acquires meaning in terms of agency and self-worth. Following Miller (2011), digital media sharing is interpreted through anthropological debates on the meanings of gifts, where gifts are either embedded in local networks of obligation (Mauss, 1925) or in notions of fame and extending the self geographically (Munn, 1992). Among these hip-hop artists, these two meanings of gift giving are respectively linked to backyard studios where gifting of digital files are situated in a sharing culture based on obligation (Mauss, 1925), and the online elsewhere, where the gift of a music file may make the hip-hop artist famous and extend their geographical sense of self beyond Grahamstown. Furthermore, we may associate the gift of obligation with African personhood (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998), while the gift of fame (Munn, 1992), online distribution and the promotion of the crew's brand, evokes a neoliberal notion of personhood in "person as enterprise" (N. Rose, 1990).

An important contribution of this chapter is the argument for township hip-hop music distribution as "translocal". Translocality argues for the acknowledgement of networks that connect various marginal spaces directly to each other, without flowing through a powerful centre, e.g. a city in the Global North (Freitag & von Oppen, 2010). The translocal here is based on the dense communication connections that create a sense of place. Hip-hop artists assume such a highly connected place-based network when they send files or download links to remote places, which enables the rapid distribution of their media in such a space. Their music distribution is conceptualised in terms of translocal links between such densely connected places, through data-light place-based sites like a *Facebook* or WAP page for a town, or even just a *WhatsApp* music file sent to one person in that town who is asked to share it with everyone. Such a translocal network affirms the importance of place and belonging, and questions assumptions related to the internet and the disappearance of place-based ties and communal values into "network individualism" (M. Castells, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Wellman & Hampton, 1999). This notion of the translocal network developed here thus contributes to the literature by creating a more complex picture of how digital networks may interact with local sociability to create contextual relationships with space that are not necessarily dislocated from place or individualistic in nature.

The chapter further argues that digital media ecologies of multi-device environments should not just be conceptualised as a selection of digital devices the user can choose from.

Instead, the way people combine different devices should be foregrounded, and such new combinations or “assemblages” (Latour, 2005) should be examined for the very specific affordances they may provide. In the backyard studio, the disconnected computer and the mobile feature phone combine to become a new assemblage that transcends both the computer’s disconnectedness from the internet and the mobile phone’s lack of media production affordances. Media here flows from digital camera to phone, from phone to DVD player. The chapter argues for an examination of the affordances that enable data flow between various digital devices, which may, for example, construct separate USB and SD card environments.

This chapter responds to appeals to consider creativity as not only seated in digital production, but also existing in the building and reconfiguration of infrastructure, such as building distribution networks (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a; Larkin, 2008). In the postcolonial world, where infrastructure is often broken or unequally distributed, such creativity is sorely needed. By necessity this often means co-opting existing digital networks in poor communities, particularly “pirate” infrastructure predominantly used for copyright avoidance. In this chapter I specifically explore the hip-hop artists’ difficulties of affording and accessing internet data, and of trying to access media platforms while only having basic feature phones, and what this means for online distribution. Hip-hop artists respond with innovative solutions in which they remix technologies, such as the two-step internet access for the computer through the mobile phone, and using “grey” file-sharing platform *Datafilehost* in conjunction with *Facebook* to distribute their music. The compression rates they need to implement to cater for their own limited data budgets and also to accommodate data-constrained fans mean that the noise of digital artefacts becomes part of the aesthetics of the medium, as it does in other spaces constrained by infrastructure (Larkin, 2008). Such innovative distribution networks, however, bypass the more data-heavy mainstream streaming-data media platforms, so that these marginalised hip-hop artists also remain marginalised in the online world.

7.1 Neighbourhood networks via Bluetooth

In the literature on the relationship between digital media and the nature of communities, various leading ICT scholars argue that these devices assist the process of disconnecting people from the immediate relationships with others in place-based communities, and lead to “networked individualism”, where sociability is centred around dispersed networks built

around individuals, and no longer attached to gatherings in local places (Manuel Castells, 2001; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Wellman, 2001). These scholars argue that digital media will accelerate remote social ties, continuing a process that started in the 19th century in the Western world, through the advancement of transport and communication technologies (see also Thompson, 2011). Castells (2010, p. 410) proposes that, in a networked society, place will increasingly be replaced by the “space of flows”, which are the virtual spaces that underpin instantaneous communication in networks. To what extent are such assumptions about digital media and communication and the diminishing of place-based sociability valid for the developing world? In contrast to the individualism and exclusive walled gardens that mobile phones cultivate in the Western world (Ling, 2004; Ling & Pedersen, 2005), the mobile phone in Jamaica was shown to cultivate a place-based sociability, where users engaged in “link-up” with a multitude of acquaintances they encountered on the streets (Horst & Miller, 2006, p. 81). Various other scholars working in the field of social media have also questioned the link between individualism and ICTs outside the Western world: in South Korea (Hjorth, 2010), the Philippines (Madianou & Miller, 2013; McKay, 2010) and South Africa (Bidwell, 2010; Walton, 2014; Walton et al., 2012). In a South African township, sociability is characterised by constant pedestrian traffic and interaction with neighbours, and is very different from suburban sociability where there is little interaction with the immediate surroundings (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, & Seekings, 2010). While Wellman (2001) attributes place-based sociability to the rural village of a different era, it is a characteristic of contemporary urban South African township life. My own work, looking at one particular “coloured” area in Grahamstown, argues for the role of mobile phones in promoting such a place-based sociability (Schoon, 2012a; Schoon & Strelitz, 2014). Face-to-face interaction is essential for offline digital media exchange, which is how most media in the Global South is distributed (Bird, 2011). Hip-hop artists in Grahamstown townships exploited place-based sociability in their distribution of music tracks using *Bluetooth*. They acknowledged that if a track was distributed on *Bluetooth*, it would only be a matter of time before “everyone” in Grahamstown had a copy.

Zion Eyes: It’s one of the things that is very common in our township here with – we spread everything via cellphone – we *Bluetooth*. *Bluetooth* is for free so you just *Bluetooth* everyone that you can *Bluetooth*. And those people will *Bluetooth* other people. So, that’s how the music spread all over Grahamstown, actually (Personal communication, 11 April 2014).

Bluetooth was seen as the easiest way to make an impact on a local level in distributing music. Some hip-hop artists adopted a method of non-intervention, sharing the track with a few friends and relying on them to distribute it via *Bluetooth*, while others took an active approach, and would “send out a lightie”, a young boy, to go and “make his rounds”, walking around various streets engaging with young people, actively sharing the track with anyone he could via *Bluetooth*. Since most phones were *Bluetooth* enabled, *Bluetooth* distribution was described as being the “lowest level” of sophistication. In comparison, internet distribution was seen as reaching wider and therefore being better, illustrating how distribution practices were also part of a process of “digital distinction” that signalled more legitimacy.

Some music producers speculate that illicit *Bluetooth* sharing has had a much larger impact on the South African music industry than P2P networks (Green, 2012, p. 28), demonstrating the ubiquity of this practice. *Bluetooth* sharing in Grahamstown followed a cascade model of distribution, where each person passed the MP3 file on to other persons, who then continued to distribute it. As it was just as easy for a person to delete the file from their phone as it was to pass it on, the distribution chain could reach a sudden dead end. Many young people had very limited memory on their feature phones to store songs; some could only store three songs at a time. This could result in a song being very popular and on everyone’s phone one week, but disappearing the next week when people erased their memory to make space for the next popular track. XNasty described *Bluetooth* sharing as a “grab and go” market, which was not as “constant” as uploading a file to the internet. These files did not have the “permanency” of online social media (boyd, 2008), as it was not preserved on a cloud server or other shared archive. However, *Bluetooth* allowed for a song to spread very fast in the community and it was thus a way of reaching a large group of people, especially among those who could not afford airtime. It was a method that fitted the pedestrian, sociable culture of the township, where *Bluetoothing* a media file from one phone to another has become part of everyday social interaction. Here the network topology of *Bluetooth* exchange thus resembled a “maximally interconnected” network, where each person could easily connect to any other person, similar to the social networking at a conference (Adams, 1998, p. 91). One may thus compare the pedestrian *Bluetoothing* culture to peer-to-peer networks where computers spread media through such distributed networks. Here it was not algorithms that searched for media on remote computers, but people who were physically walking, asking people about their media, and then transferring it.

7.2 USB sharing and backyard “sneakernets”

When computers were introduced to the township, this meant that offline media sharing no longer purely relied on mobile phone-based *Bluetoothing* of media, but could be done via a USB connection from a backyard computer directly to the phone’s memory. Computer scientists call the physical transfer of information from computers onto flash drives “sneakernets”, emphasising that the network is created by walking (Boutin, 2002). Computer hard drives are significantly bigger than phone memory cards, which meant that here they became repositories for digital media in the community. Suffocate provided neighbours with copies of the latest music from his computer’s hard drive, some he had previously downloaded on his phone, and saw such media sharing as an opportunity to promote his own music and always added some of his own tracks. Those who came to copy media would leave other media behind. CashSmizzo was proud of the fact that in the three weeks he had had his new computer he had already accumulated nearly 20 movies from his visitors’ flashsticks on his hard drive. The yard computer did not just cater for fellow hip-hop artists, but supplied the whole neighbourhood with digital media. This was related to the predominant sharing culture and the semi-public nature of the backyard room. In these rooms, visitors were constantly arriving, walking straight into the space without knocking and making themselves at home inside, while greeting their host and other visitors. When I asked Njilo about this practice, he told me that neighbours came around for movies almost every day; that very morning some of his cousins had come into his room while he was washing and left with a flashstick full of movies. The backyard computers thus became important nodes in this network of digital exchange, so changing the network to a more clustered topology where media exchange happened as people clustered around backyard computers (see Adams, 1998). None of the hip-hop artists charged people money for any of this media, but enjoyed being able to share such media, engaging in a type of “gifting” that created ties of obligation with family, friends and neighbours (Mauss, 1925). Through being the owner of a computer and the centre of all this magnamity, they could arguably express their African personhood in their “wealth in people” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, p. 269).

Main Event: Like if you had a computer, yo you have everything, man!
Zion Eyes: And your house will be filled with lots of people every day!
Some people want to copy music, cos hey we don’t usually
buy music like buying CDs and everything. No, you just bring
an empty CD and go “Come on burn me this CD!”...Now we

were introduced to MP3s, MP3s are the thing! So you will put a long list of songs in one CD. [laughs]

Main Event: Then after CDs came flashsticks (Personal communication, 15 August 2014).

Blank CDs or DVDs are now so ubiquitous that they are sold at the corner shops in the township along with essential ingredients such as sugar and paraffin. Flashsticks had been popular for the past six years, according to Zion Eyes, and had become common in the township around 2008, shortly after computers arrived here. They were often gifts passed on from urban relatives. Of the younger artists I spoke to, many had acquired their first flashstick before a mobile phone, and always carried it around their necks. Flashsticks formed a central role in the digital media ecologies of this space, particularly since nearly half of households in Grahamstown's townships owned DVD players (STATSSA, 2011). Many of the newer players now had a USB slot where one could plug in a flashstick. This meant that one did not need a phone or computer to consume digital music or movie files, but could simply play it on a DVD player directly from the flashstick. In studying digital media ecologies holistically, it thus reveals how digital media flows from a single user connected to the internet to multiple others through various digital devices, whether these are computers, mobile phones, flash drives, DVD players or digital cameras. As a device that enabled data flow to other devices, the flash drive and its affordances were particularly important in the hip-hop digital media ecology.

A flash drive was considered much safer a data storage medium than a mobile phone since, due to its cheap price, it was not particularly targetted for theft. It was also safe from copying. As Walton et al. (2012) show, in these township environments not sharing is looked on with suspicion and friends may have total access to each other's mobile phone data. It was therefore common practice to pick up and browse a friend's phone media as if it were a *Facebook* page, and then copy music or photographs to your own phone via *Bluetooth* (Walton, 2014). Hip-hop MCs were, however, loath to share the exclusive beats they had paid producers to compose specially for their tracks, which was why Shepherd preferred his producer to save his beats onto a flashstick instead of onto his phone. He was convinced that if he stored it on his mobile phone, someone would copy his track without his permission, using *Bluetooth*. Shepherd's story illustrates the two separate mini-ecologies that form around data flow based on either micro SD phone cards or USB sticks. While a USB stick would allow media to be played on a DVD or MP3 player, it can only be copied from a computer. In this environment where computers are rare, it is thus a less promiscuous medium than a micro

SD card in a phone with *Bluetooth*, so allowing for more secure data control. In keeping with the social mores of African personhood (Gyekye, 1998), while it was thus not appropriate to constrain friends from sharing one's media, one could adopt subtle strategies to limit the shareability or sharing affordances of a media file, such as placing it on a USB stick. We have seen such strategies to limit shareability in the previous chapter too, where hip-hop artists installed portable hard drives inside the computer, so that others would not consider them shareable.

Not all flash drive media was playable on DVD, however, and to read stored web pages and PDF documents one needed a friend with a computer. The flash drive enables one to visit a computer connected to the internet, download websites and read them on a backyard computer at your leisure. Given that time granted on public access computers is often very limited (Walton & Donner, 2012), this example illustrates the important role backyard computers can play in supplementing access to information. Zion Eyes remembered the excitement and the feeling of abundance he experienced when he first acquired a flash drive, long before he first owned a computer. He filled it not just with music, but also with information about Black Consciousness and African history from a variety of websites. It helped him perform his aspiration to live an intellectual life, or to be "the kind of man who likes collecting informations", illustrating how the flash drive can enable users to claim an idealised identity, a process Miller and Slater (2000, p. 10) call "expansive realisation". Zion Eyes used his flash drive to gift media files back to the information commons of the backyard computer, treating it like a community library. He would read the information on his flash drive on a backyard studio computer when visiting a producer, copy it over to the hard drive and then format his flashstick and load files other people had left behind on the hard drive onto his flashstick. He would alert the producer that he had left some interesting information on his computer, and enjoyed being able to magnanimously invite others to also copy the interesting files he had deposited there. Then he would visit another studio and investigate what others had left there. At some point in the future when he wanted to read up about ancient Egyptians again, he would return to the original studio and collect his files again.

7.3 Mobile internet access and the materiality of the network

To share digital media online, hip-hop artists needed to connect to the mobile internet, as they did not have access to broadband at home. While several accessed broadband in local public libraries, they explained that libraries often disapproved of noisy media sites. The mobile

internet was available if one had a feature phone, but presented its own challenges, particularly in the affordability of data. Donner (2015) cautions that one should not make assumptions about the universal nature of the internet and its use: mobile internet users in the Global South may, due to issues of affordability, limit their internet use to text applications that use a trickle of data, which is qualitatively different from the global media-rich streaming broadband internet of the developed world. In order to economise on their mobile internet use, many of the hip-hop artists had opted for the prepaid *Blackberry Internet Services* or *BIS* which offered internet data for a month for about R60. Artists became acutely aware of the savings they incur through *BIS* when comparing it to the price of regular data bundles. Azlan explained that when he ran out of *BIS* for a few days at the end of the month, he would buy a 20MB bundle, which would last him three days. If he had to buy ten of these bundles to last him the whole month, it would be more than R100, much more expensive than *BIS*. What this choice meant, however, was that artists were locked into using the *Blackberry* phone

Many of the hip-hop artists I met were extremely aware of the comparative cost between different mobile phone networks for data costs, but also had to factor in the various geographical network availability patterns. Retaliation and Nova preferred *Cell C* for their cheap data bundles – for R15 you could buy a 100MB bundle – however, the network signal was not always available up on the hill in Hooggenoeg. Sometimes they had to use *MTN*, which was much more expensive at 20MB for R10, and what's more the first 10MB expired 24 hours after purchase. The variable connectivity had meant that Retaliation had to invest in three SIM cards to always be connected to the mobile internet at the best price. This caused him considerable stress because whenever *Cell C* was not available and he was connecting to the mobile internet on one of the other SIM cards, he was worried that he might be missing a call for a job – he had listed his *Cell C* number with all the job agencies. What's more, his girlfriend did not like the fact that he needed to have so many SIM cards, a practice understood to be a sign of a secret lover in this community.

Internet access was thus not only constrained by data costs but also by fluctuating network footprints. One may attribute this to the apartheid legacy of unequal telecommunications infrastructure investment in townships (Pritchard & Vines, 2013). On the furthest border of Grahamstown, in a new area referred to as Transit Camp, there was often no mobile internet. Meanwhile, 3G was nearly universally available in the centre of town and the predominantly white suburbs. Ulizwi complained that his access to internet in the township was intermittent and inferior, due to its high cost and the slow speed of the network. This was further constrained by the affordances of his feature phone, which could not access

the 3G network, and was limited to EDGE. Mobile broadband data speeds vary significantly and is determined not only by the footprint of the cellphone tower, but also by the affordances of the mobile phone. Only 39% of mobile phones in South Africa are 3G-enabled smartphones (“GSMA Intelligence – Research – From feature phones to smartphones, the road ahead”, 2013), and multimedia feature phones tend to be limited to the EDGE signal, which is one seventh the speed of 3G (Muller, 2007). Slower internet speeds made it more likely that the browser would time out in the middle of an upload or download, which may be attributed to latency (Marshini Chetty, Sundaresan, Muckaden, Feamster, & Calandro, 2013). I watched CashSmizzo try to upload his video to the local music site *KasiMP3*. He was very frustrated when it timed out after 15 minutes online. However, he did not seem surprised and explained that this often happened to him.²⁹ Time-outs were particularly prevalent in websites that were very graphic intensive such as the popular international hip-hop music site *Reverbnation.com*. Retaliation complained that if he opened this site or other “high resolution” sites on his *Blackberry*, it would start freezing because the site was “too big” and would then restart. The internet hip-hop artists accessed was therefore a limited internet, not only did they have to approach it like a running meter (M. Chetty, Banks, Brush, Donner, & Grinter, 2011) due to its cost, but infrastructure and the feature phone’s affordances made access erratic and limited to certain websites.

7.4 Two-step internet assemblages

In the backyard hip-hop studio, the computer could not be connected directly to the internet, but needed to do so through the mobile phone’s access to the mobile internet via the memory card. Downloads here were conceptualised not only in terms of airtime needed for data bundles, but also in terms of the space available on the phone’s memory card. This was because most artists did not own sophisticated smartphones that could be tethered to the computer to transfer downloaded files directly onto the computer’s hard drive. It meant that any downloads had to be transferred from the phone’s memory card to the computer via a USB cable. Azlan expresses below his desire for such a smartphone with tethering ability,

²⁹ A fellow postgraduate computer science student tested the *KasiMP3* site for latency and discovered that the signal path crossed through Arizona to the Netherlands, despite the fact that it had a South African web domain. He speculated that the recent difficulties hip-hop artists were experiencing with the site could be because the owner migrated to a different server with more latency (Email communication, Thomas Reitmaier, PhD candidate, UCT ICT4D centre).

and explains how the lack of this affordance on his phone meant he had to download media as well as software installation files for his computer in a two-step internet access process.

Azlan: What I would wish, [is that] I could connect my phone to my system and download straight from my system, but unfortunately I can't do that. So what I do is, I got a 8 Gig memory card here. So, if I want to download something, I download it on my phone first, and then it is saved on my memory card, then I would use my USB cable here, and connect it to my phone to take the data and send it to my computer. If it is a program, then I would install it on my computer (Personal communication, 12 February 2014).

Previous research has focused on the choice young marginalised South Africans make between the mobile internet, and broadband internet connected to a public-access computer (Walton & Donner, 2012). These hip-hop artists, however, use the mobile internet in conjunction with the backyard computer, illustrating that a media ecology does not necessarily involve choosing one device or platform over another whether for instrumental (Walton & Donner, 2012) or normative purposes (e.g. Madianou & Miller, 2013), but could involve combining or remixing technologies. As the Actor Network approach argues, in combining technological devices, new “assemblages” may form with transformed characteristics (Latour, 2005, p. 43). We may therefore consider the backyard computer, mobile internet and SD card such an assemblage that is used by hip-hop artists in their combination, resulting in new affordances.

To cope with the unpredictability of the mobile internet and its inability to handle large file sizes, the hip-hop artists had become experienced in radically compressing files in their efforts to distribute these on the mobile internet. They needed to have small files to prevent the upload timing out, but also to save money in paying for data bundles. File conversion software was frequently used to compress the size of media and convert it to different formats. Busta, for example, found that he could not transfer the one gigabyte video a local videographer had made for him onto his mobile phone to distribute it to friends. He then used VLC media player to convert the file to a few megabytes. Words, who was an experienced graphic designer, explained that he had worked out that the optimal size to distribute still images on the mobile internet was 50KB, while a 30-second video could be compressed between 2MB and 5MB. These exceptionally low-resolution images were, however, only acceptable when viewed on the small screens of the mobile phone. Similarly, artists often exported their recordings and beats as highly compressed MP3 files with

particularly low data rates so that a track would only take up between 3MB or 4MB, about 1MB per minute of recorded song. A local sound mixing lecturer³⁰ explained that these compression levels meant digital quality was not considered professional for national radio airplay. While some of the more experienced hip-hop artists also saved high quality multi-track uncompressed versions of their tracks and preserved better quality recordings on CD using the WAV or AAC format, the majority only preserved the low-resolution media. Therefore, the digital materiality underpinning these media ecologies, an unaffordable and data-constrained mobile internet, discouraged the technical quality of much of the work and normalised this, similarly to how lack of infrastructure had also shaped aesthetic norms and tolerance for digital noise in other spaces (Larkin, 2008).

Various other “assemblages” (Latour, 2005, p. 43) were generated in the digital media ecology by combining backyard computers with 3G modems or digital cameras with the mobile internet. Artists with digital still cameras, like Zion Eyes and Azlan, would snap open their mobile phones every time they wanted to upload photos, inserting the camera’s memory card in the phone. However, they had to make sure that the digital camera’s settings were set on the lowest resolution as otherwise they would struggle uploading these. A few of the hip-hop artists had invested in a mobile modem USB dongle. This was to be able to easily update their software, and upload/download media directly via the computer’s hard drive without worrying if there was sufficient space on the phone’s memory card. Those with high-end smartphones like the *Samsung Galaxy 3* could similarly tether the phone to their computers. However, as these computers were not part of the protected media ecologies of suburban computer users where commercial virus filters and spam blockers created a firewall against such intrusions, they would quickly find their browser clogged with adware and frequently lose all their data because of a virus.

7.5 Uploading digital media

Choosing WhatsApp over Youtube

Uploading digital media to a social media site had several advantages over relying on offline modes of distribution such as the *Bluetooth* cascade distribution model. The biggest advantage was that the song would have a digital “persistence” (boyd, 2008, p. 126), still

³⁰ Personal Communication with Corinne Cooper, sound technology lecturer, Rhodes Music Department, February 2014.

findable months afterwards on the social media site when most people had stopped listening to it and had erased it from their mobile phone memories. Another advantage was that an uploaded song would be searchable, so that anyone could find it by typing in the name of the track or the hip-hop artist. Nevertheless, very few of the hip-hop artists used social media platforms like *Youtube* or *Soundcloud*, and (besides the few artists with access to suburban Wifi and ADSL), those who did, used such platforms infrequently.

Dezz: Locally they say *Youtube* uses a lot of airtime and stuff. So they prefer to download a song and listen to it like over and over again rather than watching the video (Personal communication, 14 August 2014).

This resistance to streaming media was because platforms like *YouTube* required one to pay for data to stream a video or song every time you wanted to listen to it. In the township, many people struggled to afford airtime and expected to only pay for digital media once when downloading it, and then play it offline and distribute it to their friends via *Bluetooth*. Rymgees, for example, posted the *YouTube* link of the video I had uploaded for him on his *Facebook* page, but in the comments asked that people should let him know if he should *WhatsApp* them the video file. It seemed that despite the presence of the *Youtube* link, there were probably about fifty comments in the thread of people providing their phone numbers so that he could send it to them. Rymgees told me that he had sent out the video about 200 times. Walton (2014) describes the South African low-income users' preference for downloaded media files for offline consumption, along with a range of other practices, as "pavement internet" which enables vibrant interchanges away from more formal and public online media spaces. Hip-hop artists accepted that their audiences would extend their online distribution over *WhatsApp* with co-located offline distribution in the neighbourhood, such as *Bluetooth* or backyard computer USB-cable sharing economies. When Rymgees sent the video to a friend in Oudtshoorn over *WhatsApp*, he imagined it being distributed across the entire town's hip-hop fans. Thus, here "pavement internet" (Walton, 2014) extends to encompass both an online *WhatsApp* contact and a host of offline *Bluetooth* interactions.

As producers of media, hip-hop artists mobilised this understanding to take their music to distant "pavements" or offline networks in distant spaces. By sending a track to a distant town via *WhatsApp*, they could distribute media not only to an individual, but to their associated local offline networks. Hip-hop artists thus conceptualised their audiences as "translocal" (Freitag & von Oppen, 2010) in that they considered each online file transfer via

platforms like *WhatsApp* to a distant place to result in communal place-based local distribution of the file, as people would *Bluetooth* it to others in that neighbourhood. The notion of the translocal challenges assumptions that all communication had to flow through global urban “centres” located in the developed world or local metropolitan spaces (Freitag & von Oppen, 2010). In the developing world, the information “haveless” may indeed find direct ways to connect marginal places through translocal communication networks (Cartier, Castells, & Qiu, 2005).

Following Miller’s (2011) studies of *Facebook* in Jamaica, the Grahamstown hip-hop distribution may be better understood, not in terms of Mauss’ (1925) theories of gifting rooted in obligation, but of those of Munn (1992). Munn (1992) explains gifting across the extended group of Gawa islands as associated with “fame” or extending the size of one’s social world. In sharing media with a remote place, hip-hop artists were engaging in a form of gifting no longer tied to obligation or building local social networks (Mauss, 1925). Gifting here was instead linked to recognition from remote others and notions of fame (Munn, 1992). Here metadata practices were tied to hopes for such fame. Hip-hop artists embedded metadata such as their names and images of themselves in music tracks, and imagined their tracks making them recognisable in major South African cities, when they eventually managed to visit these.

Blaqseed: For instance I haven’t been to Johannesburg literally, but my music is there via people who download the songs... When I’m around Joburg, people can say, “I know this guy” before I even sing. So, when I’m in Joburg, walking, you can actually say “where do I know him from?” – You press the phone... “Oh, he’s the one singing this song” (Personal communication, 4 July 2013).

This metadata was thus purposefully inserted in anticipation of such remote networks, unlike digital music distribution in insular localised societies like Papua New Guinea, where musicians avoided using metadata, assuming that all potential listeners were local and would recognise their music (Crowdy, 2015).

Through music distribution, the hip-hop artists were increasing their imaginary presence in the world of elsewhere, so escaping the confines of the township and its blemish of place (Wacquant, 2007). In some sense, engaging in music distribution symbolises an escape from the “stuckness” that unemployed young people, who have few prospects for social mobility or an urban lifestyle, may experience (Schoon & Strelitz, 2014). Here such

recognition by fans from elsewhere was equated with imminent social mobility and success, which may explain why Retaliation and Nova were so excited to collaborate with a beat-maker from the UK. De Botton (2004, p. 13) defines fame as not a simple numerical accumulation of fans, but deeply personally meaningful as “a quest for love from the world”. It may thus, for the hip-hop artists, provide an affirmation of their worth which the symbolic order did not grant them. Hip-hop artists imagined fame and celebrity to be within reach if only one knew the secret to unlocking its mechanisms, and doggedly pursued a plethora of social network platforms that might hold the key to such fame and, in the wake of it, ideally a way to monetise their music too.

From *KasiMP3* to *Datafilehost* – abandoning Web 2.0

Over the two-year period of fieldwork, hip-hop artists experimented with various online services to help distribute their music. At the start of the research period, there was great enthusiasm for *KasiMP3*, a local music distribution service aimed particularly at township-based musicians (see Monaheng, 2013b). The interface was simplified for mobile and only contained a few basic rectangles with text and a few small pictures, thus making it data-light compared to sites such as *Reverbnation* with its numerous graphics, complex menu system and large photographs which were obviously designed for large screens and unlimited access to data. In contrast, *KasiMP3* seemed ideal in that it provided many social media features, but was customised for a low-bandwidth environment. It was highly recommended at the first workshop I hosted in 2013. The designer and owner of the *KasiMP3* app grew up in a township, and clearly had an understanding of local bandwidth constraints (Monaheng, 2013b). The site allowed musicians to create a profile, upload photographs, music tracks and even music videos. It advertised a model that once one had reached 200 downloads, you could start claiming royalties on your music. CashSmizzo was confident that their group would soon reach 1 000 downloads on each track and would start earning money. However, last time I spoke to them their tracks had not yet reached more than 10 downloads. It was, however, not only reality tempering dreams of wealth that muted the enthusiasm for *KasiMP3*. Over the next few months the site seemed to have become more difficult to access, probably due to latency issues.

At the time that *KasiMP3* was still functioning effectively, and offered various social media functions such as following a crew profile, the hip-hop artists surprisingly did not seem to use these Web 2.0 functions. Their online discovery of new music derived primarily

from belonging to a variety of *Facebook* groups all centred around hip-hop. Hip-hop artists would create *Facebook* groups named after the town or the province and other artists would discover these tracks through *Facebook*, often through group membership recommendations based on the music groups their *Facebook* friends belonged to. Then artists would join the groups and post links to their music there. One of the rappers had the strategic sense to create a *Facebook* page that compared Eastern Cape and Western Cape hip-hop music, which was hugely popular, with nearly 2 000 members. These place-based *Facebook* groups allowed for the creation of translocal links, connecting hip-hop artists famous in one township with other remote townships.

It was through such *Facebook* groups that hip-hop artists would not only discover new music, but could also learn new ways to distribute music. Thus Dezz and his group discovered *Datafilehost* when they became frustrated with the slow speed of *KasiMP3*.

Dezz: So we saw *Datafilehost* on *Facebook*, right. Then we googled and googled and we found out this is the other site we can use. And it's the easiest 'cos you don't even need to sign up for some profile or something. You just upload the song and they give you the link, you spread it – BOOM – and that's it (Personal communication, 14 August 2014).

Datafilehost provided online storage space to upload files without even having to log onto the site, and then provided a cryptic link to the file consisting mainly of numbers. It was clearly not designed for showcasing digital media, but was an anonymous file sharer, probably designed for private sharing between one or two individuals, or possibly to share pirated media anonymously similarly to *MegaUpload* (see Dredge, 2015). This shows the proliferation of “grey” informal media economies (Lobato & Thomas, 2012) in low-income communities, a postcolonial urban configuration described as “pirate modernity” (Sundaram, 2009). In postcolonial marginal spaces, state and commercial infrastructure was often broken, unaffordable or absent (Larkin, 2008). Marginal media producers from low-income communities in the Global South tend therefore to mobilise the infrastructure that is present and thriving in these spaces – the infrastructure of “piracy” or copyright infringement (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014b). While conceptualising *Datafilehost* in this original manner as a distribution network could not be attributed to the Grahamstown hip-hop group, it was a creative innovation in South Africa's broader hip-hop community. It is indeed such innovations in creating affordable distribution infrastructure in the developing world which

should be universally celebrated. They enable the circulation of original media and let marginal people find a voice in the digital space.

Over the course of 2014, *Datafilehost* became a firm favourite with local hip-hop artists as it was extremely economical on data usage due to a lack of pictures, minimal text and no adverts. There was no elaborate menu system, only one button for either upload or download, depending on whether you arrived at the root of the site or at a download link. The link was reliable, and data upload or download was extremely fast compared to other services. Hip-hop artists appreciated that one did not even have to log on to access a link, so saving them another step in data costs. It was thus the digital materiality (Leonardi, 2010) of *Datafilehost* in terms of data usage which made it preferable among hip-hop artists.

Despite its frugal data-light interface, *Datafilehost* displayed one crucial bit of information that the hip-hop artists would frequently visit the site to check: the download counter which showed how many times the file had been downloaded. Hip-hop artists would become excited once the downloads started getting more than about 500, as this signified a hit. Rymgees was particularly proud of the fact that one of his songs had more than 6 000 downloads. Thus the download counter also functioned to convey legitimacy, a legitimacy which was acknowledged in the community of practice but outside of its control: conveyed here not by senior “masters”, but by outsiders. The idea of numerous fans and fame thus also created possibilities of affirmation which were not necessarily associated with the values of black consciousness within the CoP due to an orientation away from the space of socialisation of face-to-face interaction and the cyphers. When senior hip-hop heads critiqued “those who just record”, they were not only critical of a backyard studio establishing a culture outside of the black consciousness ethos of the broader community, but also arguably the virtual associations that might result from recordings that fall outside of the conscious hip-hop genre.

Facebook and WhatsApp link-sharing marketing

Despite being an online database that made it theoretically accessible by anyone with internet, *Datafilehost* had no Web 2.0 social networking affordances for tagging and so did not enable the creation of a folksonomy (Tapscott & Williams, 2008) of user-created data about the track, nor did it have the affordance of searchability (boyd, 2008). On *Datafilehost*, it was not possible to “follow” an artist, look at their profile pictures, or follow links to other media, or even to read a description of the song. Yet the hip-hop artists did not seem too

worried about this; the lack of these Web 2.0 benefits was outweighed by the low data costs. This meant that only those who were directly sent the link, or who were exposed to it through social networks feeds like *Facebook*, could access the download. The hip-hop artists were not that concerned about such limitations, probably because their data-constrained internet use was not characterised by the luxury of extended browsing through social recommendations for media based on similar tags. They could not afford the data costs to leisurely move from one link to another through a Web 2.0 platform like *Youtube*. As Suffocate lamented, “browsing eats data”. In this environment people followed the “grab and go” approach to downloading to minimise data costs, and browsing was not a common internet behaviour (Walton & Donner, 2012). Hip-hop artists were aware of these limitations, but had found a way to still incorporate their media into a social media network.

Dezz: *Datafilehost* doesn’t give you tags or maybe thumbnails or something like that. And it doesn’t give you even a space to leave your information. It’s just the song, no description, nothing. So we just leave it there and just spread the link. You leave the description under the link that we are sharing, maybe on *Facebook* or something like that, so we leave it there (Personal communication, 14 August 2014).

Through *Facebook*, hip-hop artists could again anchor their online music to the Grahamstown community, and also associate it with a Web 2.0 environment where it would enter their friends’ *Facebook* feeds, be associated with the song’s name and a short description, and allow friends to easily repost the information. This meant that the song would enter their “networked public” (boyd, 2011a) and become discoverable. To boost such discoverability, artists would repost the *Datafilehost* link to a song every few weeks in various *Facebook* groups. Through *Facebook*, they therefore also provided a form of “metadata”, as they listed the track name and rappers in the post, and since they did not use privacy settings on their *Facebook* accounts, this meant such *Facebook* “metadata” made a song searchable. Dezz explained it was possible to find songs by entering the name of the song as well as “*Datafilehost*” in the search string, which would then deliver the *Facebook* post of the download link.

Therefore, combining *Facebook* and *Datafilehost* allowed a music file posted on an obscure platform to have much of the affordances of one posted on social media. We may therefore consider such a combination or remix to produce another “assemblage” (Latour, 2005) in combining different platforms. By associating metadata about the track and its

download link through *Facebook*, the impossible-to-remember download link could be found and was allowed some sense of permanence. This discoverability was reinforced by repeated postings on personal as well as group *Facebook* pages. Invisible audiences were able to discover the track in their feed by joining such *Facebook* groups, which generally promoted translocal links as most groups were associated with small towns. *Facebook* therefore became the conduit for music discoveries, which linked music to invisible audiences, not only through the information associated with individual media files, but primarily through the *Facebook* groups where such files were posted. Unforeseen or “invisible” audiences (boyd, 2008) were therefore probably limited to working-class South Africans who were familiar with the *Datafilehost/Facebook* combination. If one accessed a *Datafilehost* link on a PC, for example, as I attempted to do, one would receive a warning that the site contains various malware if one have any virus protection. This would probably deter many South African middle-class users as well as international users who were more likely to access the internet on a PC and warier of the “feral internet” (Bell, 2010).

It was clear that thousands of South African users were still using *Datafilehost* despite such deterrents. A *Google* search for both *Datafilehost* AND *Facebook* revealed a plethora of links, and a cursory browse through these revealed many *Facebook* pages distributing house music as well as hip-hop. The analytics service, *Easycounter*, counted 105 000 unique visitors to *Datafilehost* every day, with most of the traffic originating in India. It was equally popular in South Africa and Nigeria, whose share of the total users was 7% each. This meant about 7 000 South Africans accessed *Datafilehost* every day. *Datafilehost* is indeed South Africa’s most popular hip-hop filesharing site, as the African Hip-hop blog reports (Monaheng, 2013a). On this site, blogger Tseliso Monaheng (2013a) despairs at the large number of hip-hop artists, including successful South African hip-hop artists, who have abandoned sites such as *Soundcloud* and *KasiMP3* to embrace *Datafilehost*. He acknowledges that *Datafilehost* was accessible on many more phones than other platforms, and worked on older Blackberry’s and Nokia phones, but criticised the platform for its embedded adware, inaccurate download counter, and lack of analytics. Many artists are probably not aware that if a file is not active for 90 days, it will be erased. While Monaheng’s (2013a) call for artists to use *Soundcloud* might make sense for the smartphone user with a middle-class fan base, it was clearly not where artists imagined they would encounter the masses of South African fans without such phone technology. *Datafilehost* links were often the only links that hip-hop artists posted to *Facebook*. Unlike middle-class users of nearby Rhodes University, among most of the hip-hop artists there was seldom any sharing of news

articles, links to *Youtube* videos or blogs. As one of the artists explained to me, it was often difficult to open a link on *Facebook* with a mobile phone, as their feature phones only allowed for one browser window to be opened at a time. Observations of their *Facebook* profiles revealed that for their postings they mostly uploaded images and wrote their own captions to these, or they distributed other people's images, such as memes with motivational messages.

Once an artist had uploaded the track and promoted it through *Facebook*, they would also explore other platforms to market their music, such as *WhatsApp*. One of the most common ways of doing so was to update one's status message on *WhatsApp*. The *WhatsApp* status message was designed to communicate the availability of the user for a chat and when one visited the setting, various options are suggested such as the default "I'm on *WhatsApp*" or "Available" and other statuses which would explain why a user was not immediately replying, such as "At the movies", "At work", "Battery about to die" and "Urgent calls only". It was also possible to insert one's own status message, and hip-hop artists frequently did so to communicate not their availability, but their news, often with a simultaneous change to the profile image to illustrate such news³¹. Despite the many differences between *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* platforms, these postings on *WhatsApp* were thus quite similar to the way these young people combined text and image on *Facebook*, as well as harking back to the way pictures and status messages would have been used on *MXit* handles when it was still a popular platform (Walton & Leukes, 2013). Rymgees liked to change his photo every two days at least. A changed photo would immediately attract attention, as it would transform from the old to the new image as one scrolled through your list of *WhatsApp* contacts, thus alerting others to a new message which carried no cost for either sender or receiver. Frequently the picture was of another person. IThala Lenyani changed his picture to that of his girlfriend to announce in his status message that they had hooked up, and Dezz made his picture the image of a friend who was having a birthday that day, with a congratulatory birthday message in his status. Often the status message would relate to the release of a song. Rymgees posted the *Datafilehost* link to the song celebrating his grandmother on the anniversary of her death after changing his profile photo to one of the two of them hugging. Old pictures frequently resurfaced, but with different messages in the status info, with the

³¹ The 2017 version of *WhatsApp* incorporated a functionality very similar to the way these hip-hop artists were using the *WhatsApp* status line, adding a special status tab where users could add a status message with a photo or gif that would disappear within 24 hours.

reposted photo drawing attention to the new message. There were photos of album covers with links to the track, event announcements with images of ticket sale prices, photos of outings to Port Elizabeth and further afield with messages outlining the itinerary. There were images that presented a particularly intellectual self, for example, the image of Zion Eyes with his chess board, posing as if he is about to move a pawn, with text asking for someone to play chess with him over the weekend. Sometime later, this image was reposted with a statement about leadership in Africa. IThala Lenyani posted a motivational meme quoting Charles Kendall Adams as his *WhatsApp* photo:

No student ever attains very eminent success by simply doing what is required of him: It is the amount and excellence of what is over and above the required, that determines the greatness of ultimate distinction – Charles Kendall Adams.

While IThala Lenyani was not a student, he wanted to be one and was constantly looking online for university programmes that might accept him. The meme thus helped him embrace a student identity, so using digital media to define the kind of person he could be if he had the means, what Miller and Slater (2000, p. 10) call “expansive realisation”. Thus, these messages helped to reinforce identities of prestige, intellectualism, and resilience. As these messages were not stored, but disappeared every time a new status and photo were posted, they were more ephemeral than those posted on a *Facebook* page.

It was also possible to spread the download link via *WhatsApp* using a broadcast message. This was a service *WhatsApp* offered to send a chat message to many people at the same time. Azlan was one of the artists who used broadcast messages to his group of about 50 local hip-hop artists to advertise his studio services with messages such as the following: “Record two tracks for only R26 – free mixing and free mastering. Now’s your chance”. Rymgees’s *WhatsApp* broadcast happened at least twice a week, often every day, where he would address the readers as “Dear *WhatsApp* Fam” and share the latest news about a recorded track, or remind them of an old track. He kept up an enthusiastic communication with his fanbase with messages such as the following: “Who is ready for our latest release...Just asking, was busy in the studio, we’re dropping it today, keep a look out”. These broadcast *WhatsApp* messages were much more popular with hip-hop artists than *WhatsApp* groups because they promoted a “radial network” (Adams, 1998, p. 91) with the hip-hop artist at its centre. *WhatsApp* groups, in contrast, enabled everyone to talk to everyone, a “maximally interconnected” network (Adams, 1998, p. 91) which not only removed the hip-

hop artist from the central point in the conversation, but also cost more, as one used data to send and receive messages.

WhatsApp lacked the social media affordances *Facebook* offered as a platform, such as online searchability, permanence, and accidental discovery by an invisible audience for which it was not originally intended, the shared characteristics of most social networks (boyd, 2008). What it did offer was immediate delivery to the recipients. While these feature phones often did not deliver *Facebook* notifications when the user was logged out, anyone with *WhatsApp* installed would get notified immediately a message was sent, even when the app was closed. If a broadcast group was already created, it did not need to be constituted again, but one could simply post another message into the broadcast group. Therefore, the combination of *Datafilehost* and *WhatsApp* produced an assemblage that instantly connected groups of people to newly published music tracks online, functioning like push notifications for these music tracks.

WAP – the Global South’s answer to distribution platforms

While hip-hop artists mainly used *Datafilehost* in conjunction with *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*, one of the hip-hop artists, Rymgees, also used mobile WAP³² sites like *Blinx* (<http://blinx.mobi>)³³ and *Konings* (<http://konings.me>) to upload his hip-hop tracks for distribution. This was because his crew published a lot of Afrikaans hip-hop, and these WAP sites predominantly catered for Afrikaans hip-hop fans. WAP sites have for some time had a strong presence in “coloured” communities as gossip networks (Schoon, 2012a), and familiarity in using and constructing such sites may explain why they had now become adopted for Afrikaans hip-hop. Rymgees and his crew had a folder in the Eastern Cape section of these WAP sites where one could download their music tracks, and other artists were similarly linked to place, illustrating its translocal character. Sites like *Blinx* were optimised for low-end feature phones. They were built on the web platform *Wapka* (<http://wapka.mobi>), and used the WAP protocol, the “bottom of the range of mobile internet platforms” (Goldstuck, cited in Walton & Donner, 2012, p. 15) and were thus accessible to

³² WAP stands for “Wireless Application Protocol” and is a technical standard that allowed for the development of the first web browsers for mobile phones.

³³ Most of these mobile sites are only visible on a mobile browser. When using a PC browser to view, use a spoof agent like <http://www.technipages.com/google-chrome-change-user-agent-string> and follow the instructions on the page and then select a mobile browser.

many more feature phones than internet apps or data-heavy websites designed for computer screens.

Blinx's developer had become a *Facebook* friend of Rymgees, and was open to be interviewed on *WhatsApp*.³⁴ He described himself as "a regular coloured guy" from the "location" in Beaufort West, who loved Afrikaans hip-hop. He explained that he had created the entire site on his mobile phone by cutting and pasting HTML code from the web into the *Wapka* platform. He learnt how to do this by connecting with a developer who he had met online on another WAP site's forum, someone he had never met and who he described only as "a Xhosa guy", and who had coached him how to do this over the phone for a small payment. The *Blinx* developer's story illustrates the extraordinary ingenuity of marginalised young people in their construction of distribution platforms for the frugal internet. These platforms fulfilled a need created by the lack of affordable infrastructure in such postcolonial marginalised communities and were often intertwined with media piracy networks (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a; Larkin, 2008). The *Wapka* platform may be thought of as the *Blogger* of the frugal internet of the Global South in that it was an easily learnt interface that allowed anyone with an internet-enabled phone the ability to construct a mobile WAP site on the platform. Most of the *Wapka* platform's users were located in Indonesia at the time of this research (see <http://www.alex.com/siteinfo/wapka.mobi>), suggesting that the platform was developed there. It illustrates the South-South translocal flows of digital ingenuity in the creation of distribution platforms. Like other distribution platforms in the Global South, they were thoroughly embedded in media piracy economies, while also providing outlets for content created by the marginalised (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a; Sundaram, 2009). In South Africa, for example, the *VendaMP3* WAP offers traditional songs, reggae and hip-hop all in the minority TshiVenda language, alongside downloadable Hollywood movie clips and commercial R&B love songs (see <http://vendamp3.wapka.mobi>).

Digital distinction in Web 2.0 platforms

While most hip-hop artists preferred data-light sites such as *Datafilehost*, WAP sites and *Facebook* mobile, there were a few who used more conventional Web 2.0 social media sites such as *Soundcloud*, *ReverbNation* and *Youtube*. These were invariably accessed through a

³⁴ *WhatsApp* interview with Blinx.mobi, 29 March 2015.

computer connected to the internet, which often meant that it relied on a member of the group having access to broadband internet. Dezz and Njilo had worked with a friend who was now a student elsewhere in the Eastern Cape, who uploaded videos to their *Youtube* site. I helped them upload the music video I made for them, and noticed that in adding metadata, they were following conventions for tagging from *Facebook*, where tagging is a way of addressing people, not of classifying media. *Facebook* tags not only aim to identify people in photographs, but to draw their attention, as well as their friends' attention, to what you have posted, as such tags will make the post appear in their news feeds. The tags Dezz and Snezz added to the *Youtube* video were all names of people – names of well-known Eastern Cape musicians they admired. Their aim was to alert fans of these hip-hop artists to their new song, as they knew that when people searched for these well-known artists, *Google* would help them discover Dezz and Njilo's *Youtube* video. In the same way as computer users were conceptualising the affordances in terms of the mobile phones they were familiar with, these hip-hop artists implemented tagging conventions that emerged from the platform they were familiar with, *Facebook*.

There was considerable expectation that participation in social networks and distribution through a variety of online media sharing platforms should deliver business. Azlan was sure that if he could just get the right social media distribution network, he would be able to find success. Every time I met him he would tell me of a new social media network he had discovered, and of the possibilities it offered for accessing new audiences or monetising opportunities. He had accounts on *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Reverbnation*, *Soundcloud*, *KasiMP3*, *Youtube*, *Bozza*, *iTunes*, *WordPress*, *Bandcamp*, *CMT artists*, *NumberOneMusic*, *Radiovybe*, *MySpace*, *AudioMack* and several others. He seemed to be looking for “the holy grail” of networks that would finally allow him to survive from his music. Similarly, other artists would speak of “I signed with *Facebook*, I signed with *Twitter*”, conflating signing up with a social network and signing with a distribution company that would undertake to market your work. Despite the optimistic associations these hip-hop artists had between social media and success, it had so far escaped them, and no one I encountered had sold a music track on any of these sites. We may therefore argue that social media allows hip-hop artists to embrace a soon-to-be successful identity, where their brand was visible everywhere, thus also speaking to their personhood based in enterprise (N. Rose, 1990).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how hip-hop artists innovatively combine or remix various technologies to distribute their media, to create new assemblages for media distribution. These assemblages include combining the backyard computer and the mobile internet for two-step internet access, and the combination of “grey” platform *Datafilehost* with both *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* respectively. Such combinations or remixes create new affordances. Here downloading is optimised for data-light feature phone digital media ecologies, and the file link’s display on *Facebook* enables Web 2.0 discoverability and searchability for files that otherwise don’t have such affordances (boyd, 2008). This study therefore calls on media researchers in the Global South to be on the lookout for the creative construction of such assemblages within the digital media ecologies of marginalised people. Combining technologies into assemblages may enable media producers in marginalised communities to modify the affordances of various devices and platforms to suit their constraints. The findings further demonstrate that just as in other postcolonial societies, existing pirate networks here, such as *Datafilehost* and WAP sites, enable South African marginalised media producers to distribute their own local content, creating new spaces of circulation for such content alongside pirated media (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a; Sundaram, 2009). Such pirate networks are here combined and entwined with mainstream platforms *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*. Lobato and Thomas (2012) argue that “grey”, informal digital applications and platforms are always intertwined with formal digital economies and they cannot be separated from each other, just like a country’s informal and formal economies cannot be separated. These findings therefore reinforce such claims.

The findings describe the face-to-face world of digital media distribution of *Bluetooth* and backyard computers, and show how such media gifting (Mauss, 1925) becomes part of a sharing culture linked to concepts of African personhood. This is contrasted with online media distribution, which allows hip-hop artists to construct notions of an escape from their territorially bounded “stuckness” in the township, and through such gifting (Munn, 1992) imagine a relationship with broader urban South Africa and the world, and being famous and successful. This notion of the self as successful brand, I argue, is an identity constructed through seeing the self in neoliberal terms, the “person as enterprise” (N. Rose, 1990). Despite this notion of an expanded, possibly global, network, most distribution is still conceptualised in translocal terms, where the hip-hop artist is embedded in the place-based networks of Grahamstown, connecting with other remote places through placed-based nodes

of connection, whether these nodes are place-based folders on a hip-hop WAP site, or *Facebook* groups related to place. In some ways these findings therefore challenge the notion of networked individualism (Manuel Castells, 2001; Wellman, 2001; Wellman & Hampton, 1999) because, while hip-hop artists strive to extend their networks to distant places, they arguably never dislocate themselves from existing place-based and face-to-face networks. Here we find echoes of their dreams of social progress, of “moving forward” in life, while still remaining in networks of obligation and leaving no one in their community “behind”.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Aims of the study

This dissertation has set out to discover why the hip-hop artists of Grahamstown's townships are so much more adept at digital technology practices than their peers. It also endeavoured to create a picture of the hip-hop artists' digital media ecologies (Horst et al., 2010), describing the dynamic relationship between the social and cultural context of the township, the hip-hop artists as people, and the technology they used. It has succeeded in addressing these two broad research concerns.

The dissertation has shown that unemployed young people in the marginalised space of the township are subjected to broader South African discourses that position them as "useless" or as waste (Mbembe, 2011). As Couldry (2004) argues, media practices should be understood in terms of broader meaningful practices. Hip-hop and its digital practices, I show, help these young people redefine themselves and their community as worthy. This process of redefining the self happens through a gradual process of socialisation in which digital skills acquisition is central. Thus hip-hop here can be considered a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2010), in that it allows its members to embark in a process of situated learning through participation in practices which are deeply meaningful and cultivate a sense of belonging and a resultant transformation of identity. In a CoP, each member is able to create a trajectory towards belonging by cultivating a range of practices that become gradually more complex and incurs them with more legitimacy, so creating a sense of progress (Wenger, 2010). In the case of the Grahamstown hip-hop artists, this sense of progress is not only conceptualised as allowing a more central position in the hip-hop community, but is also understood as signalling their potential to progress in broader society. It thus becomes a measure with which to assert possibilities for inclusion in the economic order and their own social mobility. Hip-hop artists thus not only show great commitment to digital learning because this allows them to assert membership of the hip-hop community, but also because it allows them to retain a belief in their eventual social mobility.

In describing the digital media ecologies of hip-hop artists, the study focused on three central spaces in these ecologies: the digitally augmented performance space of the cypher, the digital production space of the yard computer, and the communal and online spaces of digital distribution. In each of these spaces, digital hip-hop practices were shown to be incorporated into broader practices of self-worth, communal solidarity and aspiration towards social mobility. The role of each of these spaces in the hip-hop CoP was also illustrated. Here

the cypher alongside the mobile phone were important sites from which new members could enter the CoP. The backyard studio enabled situated learning where members could vie with each other to claim increased legitimacy by demonstrating computer-based skills through a process of digital distinction. The space of distribution emerged as a space through which the artist could claim legitimacy not only from members and other hip-hop communities in other towns, but also from online fans located outside the CoP. The various constraints of the digital devices the hip-hop artists owned and their limited access to data produced a very particular digital media ecology. Here hip-hop artists developed a range of innovative practices to circumvent the constraints they encountered. Several visits to repair sites run by hip-hop artists in backyard bedrooms enabled a better understanding of how repair was integral to this digital media ecology. Informed by various scholars who have urged for an increased emphasis on issues of infrastructure, breakages and repairs (Larkin, 2008; Lievrouw, 2014; Lobato, Thomas, & Hunter, 2010; Sundaram, 2009), this study was thus able to describe, as it had set out to do, this digital media ecology beyond issues of meaning and the symbolic and to affirm the importance of materiality.

8.2 Contributions emerging from the research

This study confirms the value of the media practice approach for considering media production and distribution as part of broader meaningful practices (Postill, 2010). This media practice approach has been successfully applied in other digital media ecology studies, where it enabled researchers to situate digital media practices of young people within broader practices such as the performance of friendship (Ito et al., 2010; 2013). This study has considered hip-hop media use, production and distribution within broader meaningful Grahamstown hip-hop practices of redefining the self in terms of dignity, self-worth and solidarity with others, and as progressing towards a meaningful, productive future. Such identity practices were located within the broader social context of South Africa's racialised inequality, and the nihilist subjectivities this engenders, in opposition to which hip-hop artists define themselves. Similarly to the Chicago School sociologists (Park & Burgess, 1925), this study has linked communities, media and notions of the urban, through a phenomenological approach to understanding township life. This study has conceptualised the township as situated within a struggle for symbolic power in South Africa, where everyone becomes complicit in legitimising inequality, except those who become conscious of its processes. To understand how digital media use is entangled in such broader symbolic struggles, I have

drawn on the domestication approach (Silverstone et al., 1992), which is situated within debates on audiences in Media Studies and forms part of a long tradition of examining issues of power and domination through media (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1989). It is therefore particularly useful for understanding how meaning is negotiated in situations of unequal power relations. In highlighting such contestations over dominant meanings, the study does not simply situate the unique meanings and practices of township-based hip-hop artists as different and unusual, but positions these in relation to power in broader society. The links I was able to make between the hip-hop artists' dedication to digital learning and the inequalities in South Africa, demonstrate the value of situating digital ethnography within broader concerns of power external to the field site (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

In the domestication approach, the site of such negotiations over meaning is considered to be the "border" between private and public space (Silverstone et al., 1992), which is arguably more applicable to Western social environments. In the space of the township, with its pedestrian lifestyle, crowded conditions and sharing culture, the divisions between private and public are much less pronounced (Bray et al., 2010). I therefore question the domestication approach's use of private and public, and wish to replace this concept with the more flexible notion of social spaces with their own particular borders defining struggles over meaning. Here, meaning is arguably not primarily contested in the private-public tensions, but particularly concerned with the metaphysical borders of the township and what it means to belong here. Identities play out across this dispersed geography as young people resist the township's hegemonic violent masculinity, but at the same time refuse to accept the meanings emerging from "white spaces" which seek to assimilate them into a Western culture.

This study incorporates a community of practice within the digital media ecology, and shows how it works as a motivating force to promote skills acquisition linked to an identity of professionalism through a process I term digital distinction. While other studies have situated communities of practice as central to digital skills acquisition (Harlan, Bruce, & Lupton, 2014; Ito et al., 2010), this has primarily been to argue for the importance of situated versus formal digital learning, and has not examined how a CoP may enable digital media users to reconceptualise identity. Such socialisation has been a focus of the early CoP literature, which has conceptualised identity formation as occurring through gradual meaningful practice acquisition, locating the self in time, and on a trajectory towards belonging and adopting the values of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2010). This study engages particularly with the concept of trajectories from the CoP literature. This is useful to

show how digital media practices are here embedded within broader practices of meaning-making, particularly in defining the self as a professional artist-entrepreneur. While other studies have shown how a CoP may be beneficial to cultivating advanced skill development (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Blackmore, 2010; Harlan et al., 2014), they have not extensively explored how a CoP may facilitate social change in an unequal society. By doing so, this study attempts to wrench the CoP approach away from its current location within corporate management literature where it promotes learning that supports capitalist gain (see Lesser & Storck, 2001; Wenger, 2000; Wenger & Snyder, 2000), and instead returns concerns for social learning to the liberating terrain of a Freirian model (Freire, Freire, & Macedo, 1998). Lave and Wenger's (1991) initial groundbreaking study of CoPs reflected several examples of social learning in the developing world (tailors in Liberia, midwives in Mexico), and highlighted how Alcoholics Anonymous enabled personal transformation through social learning. This study contributes to the literature by showing how the sense of status created by CoPs may be used to counter notions of alienation and exclusion from the economy among the marginalised.

In the Grahamstown hip-hop community of practice, such a trajectory of increased legitimacy and status is not only applicable inside the CoP. It is made sense of by its members as translating into possibilities for success in broader society. This shows how a trajectory may not only be meaningful inside a CoP, but may be interpreted to be meaningful in relation to the constraints of structural inequalities that foreclose opportunities for marginalised youth in South African society. CoP theory has been critiqued for not exploring a community of practice's relations of power with broader society and focusing too much on internal dynamics (Fox, 2000). In this case, the CoP may not actually empower a young person to improve their economic opportunities; it does, however, enable hope in conditions of predominant hopelessness, and promotes a range of meaningful activities and the acquisition of sophisticated digital skills. The interaction with broader society manifests not only symbolically, but also through new social networks of fans. As hip-hop is an entertainment practice where one is not only legitimated by the old-timers of the CoP, but also by the number of fans that support you, this introduces unpredictable outsider dynamics over which the other members of the CoP have little control. It particularly worries some of the old-timers who thus lose some of the power to confer legitimacy and inculcate their values of black consciousness and opposition to violent masculinities to new members. This source of legitimacy through remote fans is made possible through the reification of the hip-hop performance into a digital recording and its online distribution over the internet. For

those fans who simply download hip-hop music, these Facebook pages may function more like affinity spaces (Gee, 2005) where the media on the page provides a sense of belonging in the hip-hop scene, without necessarily demanding actual interaction with the community of musicians. While the literature on CoPs and the internet has focused on ways of bringing dispersed people together in one online space for learning (Dubé, Bourhis, & Jacob, 2006; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007; Kirschner & Lai, 2007; Pan & Leidner, 2003), the internet clearly also has the possibility of drawing people apart and into other forms of socialisation. Hip-hop artists may be drawn out of the face-to-face deep socialisation of the conscious cypher and into a more anonymous, displaced commercial ethos online. This has not been a consideration of the very insular offline CoPs that Lave and Wenger (1991) studied, such as the midwives of Mexico and the tailors of Liberia, who engaged in place-based activity with others. Wenger has subsequently considered how people may be simultaneously embedded in multiple CoPs (Wenger, 1999). The fan-based sources of status for hip-hop artists are however not based on participation in another CoP, but through becoming the object of fascination of such fan communities. This suggests that the CoP model should also include other sources of legitimacy external to the community, and bolsters Fox's (2000) claims related to the importance of external concerns related to power in the CoP model. Here integrating the conceptual tools developed in cultural studies into the CoP model, to show how power and inequality is reproduced through representations and struggles for hegemony (Hall, 2006), may be particularly useful.

However, despite its potential as a tool for extending digital skills to marginal youth, while building identities that reject violent masculinity, the Grahamstown hip-hop CoP may ironically be limited in its ability to develop the agency and technical skills of women. Here it was not just the broader gender values in society which restricted women's mobility in different spaces associated with the CoP, but also that hip-hop was better suited to a gender culture adapted to young men's typical competitive affective register (see D. Bell, Caplan, & Karim, 1993). The Grahamstown hip-hop scene, this study revealed, was deeply meaningful for young men as it allowed them to grapple with the contradictions between the important role they were expected to fulfil in their community and the minimal participation and status offered to them by the neoliberal political economy. Such insights on the symbolic importance of the CoP were due to the incorporation of the cultural studies model that underpins the domestication approach, which allows for an exploration of how power permeates social structures through symbolic forms such as the themes identified in the interviews and lyrics of the young male hip-hop artists. The study can be critiqued for not

sufficiently exploring the mechanisms that excluded young women. While there were very few women involved in the hip-hop CoP in Grahamstown, such insights may have been gleaned from interviews with young women in the poetry group, or the sisters and girlfriends of the hip-hop artists. This extended sample of participants was however not possible within the limitations of a study, which focused on the digital media practices of hip-hop artists. Despite the limited findings the study has confirmed other research which has revealed the gendered nature of many CoPs (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Meyerhoff, 2008). Where some studies have recognised the importance of language in creating gender exclusion in CoPs (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Meyerhoff, 2008), this study points to the importance of gendered spaces in the CoP and their ability to limit the participation of women. Spatial concepts are particularly important to understand the situated practices of learning in a CoP as it facilitates sociality (Jewson, 2013) and feminist scholarship has extensively engaged with issues of spatiality since Massey's (1994) seminal text, yet the CoP literature does not systematically link notions of space to gender exclusion (See Paechter, 2006 for an exploration of gender and embodiment in a community of practice).

The CoP approach is particularly useful to understand issues of meaning-making as dynamic and changing over time. In considering the relationships between different aspects of a digital media ecology, such as context, people and technology, one may conceptualise such relationships as purely spatial or conceptual. CoPs with their emphasis on meaningful trajectories of practice, emphasise chronology (Wenger, 2010). Such a focus on chronology is similarly present in the domestication approach, which explores the appropriation of a device over its lifetime (Silverstone et al., 1992). This study demonstrates the importance of chronology in a digital media ecology by showing how previous exposure to one digital device may shape how a new device is "read", as a new computer in this space could be interpreted as a sophisticated mobile phone, so re-conceptualising and reversing the remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) "written" in the design of the phone.

This study has questioned the trend of researching mobile phones in the developing world in isolation from other digital devices (Aker & Mbiti, 2010; Donner, 2015; Etzo & Collender, 2010). Instead it describes how mobile phones here are used in conjunction with other digital devices such as MP3 players, DVD players, digital cameras and computers. Some of the recent literature on ICTs in India has begun to consider how mobile phones are used in conjunction with computers located in computer shops (Ahmed, Jackson, Zaber, Morshed, & Ismail, 2013; Kumar & Parikh, 2013), and this study extends these findings. It demonstrates how people in the developing world do not necessarily only choose between

different devices at different times (Walton & Donner, 2012), but may creatively combine devices. I have shown how people remix technologies and combine the affordances of digital devices and platforms to create new hybrid “assemblages” (Latour, 2005) which are suited to the material conditions and data-light environments. Here media is transferred to and from the internet and the computer through a two-step process of mobile internet access mediated through the mobile memory card. In order both to fit on the limited space on the mobile memory card and to save data costs, media is significantly compressed on the computer, illustrating how access to infrastructure may constrain quality, as it has done elsewhere, and impact on what are considered acceptable aesthetics for the genre (Larkin, 2008). In this data-light environment, audio, video and image files are radically compressed for distribution, and many hip-hop artists who only play media on their mobile phones do not notice the difference. The combination of the formal mainstream platform such as *Facebook* with the grey platform such as *Datafilehost* is another example of such ingenuity based in the remix, which allows for a new hybrid assemblage with many of the affordances of social media, but configured for a particularly data-light environment.

The material constraints of digital media technology and the difficulty of affording data therefore compels these young people towards ingenuity. I argue that such ingenuity partly emerges from the hip-hop disposition of competence. I show how in particular, backyard desktop computers invoke “broken world thinking” (Jackson, 2014) through their frequent breakages and their affordance of ease of fixability promoted by their modular design. In adapting their devices to a culture infused with the sharing values of African personhood (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Gyekye, 1998), ingenuity may involve reconfiguring devices like portable hard drives to lose this affordance of shareability by mounting the drive inside the tower.

Another contribution of this study is to show how media distribution in marginal communities such as South African townships may take on a translocal character. It shows how *Datafilehost* is combined with *Facebook* group pages linked to the town or region to circulate hip-hop media to different towns. The obscure grey platform of *Datafilehost* operates outside mainstream media flows and thus shows, as other scholars have shown, how digital media produced by marginalised communities often remain marginal and outside of mainstream media flows (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a; Kibere, 2016; Lemos, 2014; Schoon & Strelitz, 2014). However, in this study such marginal media flows are shown to extend to other marginal township communities in other towns and cities. Such connections may be considered to connect two spaces as opposed to two individuals, as most people in such space

appear embedded in dense place-based networks of offline media distribution. The translocal media flows therefore allow marginalised communities to distribute media to other marginalised communities without moving through central metropolitan, mainstream spaces. Such translocal online connections provide another perspective from which to understand pavement internet (Walton, 2014), as not only allowing for low-cost distribution, but as facilitating a particular type of media flow connecting marginal spaces with each other. These translocal networks potentially create a space of media and information access particularly tailored to people of limited means in South Africa's townships. It allows people who could not otherwise afford it to have access to online media. Like in other postcolonial marginal urban spaces this study thus shows how informal grey platforms do not merely facilitate copyright infringement, but more importantly, access to media (Eckstein & Schwarz, 2014a; Lobato, 2008).

In terms of research on young people in South Africa, this study contributes to the literature by focusing on the subjectivities that are developed by material deprivation and symbolic violence. It differs from research on resilience in South African youth, which offer functionalist understandings of individual factors that are seen to enable youth to survive or even thrive under conditions of desperation (Mampane & Bouwer, 2011; Mosavel, Ahmed, Ports, & Simon, 2015; Theron, 2012). Instead, I provide a constructivist approach centred on issues of meaning, which highlights how young people may develop their own meaningful responses to precarious conditions and symbolic violence, to retain a sense of hope. What makes this research particularly interesting is that these hip-hop artists have a long history of engaging with negative and nihilist mindsets in the township space through their creative work, and thus could contribute sophisticated interpretations based in extensive deliberations on this topic. However, this research does not propose that nihilism and despair can be remedied by symbolic remedies alone. In fact, it calls into question some of the optimism and belief in meritocracy held by the research participants. Instead, it highlights the urgency of creating more opportunities for young people in South Africa.

In terms of the hip-hop literature, this study provides a clear example of the value of hip-hop culture in steering young people towards educational endeavours and social projects. It further shows how the concept of African personhood influences hip-hop culture in Grahamstown. The meanings associated with "the beef" and "hustling" may be interpreted in positive ways to resonate with the moral messages of conscious hip-hop in Grahamstown, where such conscious hip-hop is very much influenced by the ethics of African personhood (Metz & Gaie, 2010). African personhood calls for moral leadership and situates personhood

in the duty of giving advice to others (Gyekye, 1998), and it may be this particular duty which informs the moral dimension with which “the beef” is interpreted in Grahamstown. African personhood furthermore foregrounds the power of social networks to realise projects, and particularly values those who are able to mobilise and put together such social networks (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001). If hustling is interpreted in terms of this notion of social mobilisation and achieving “wealth in people”, it loses its negative dimensions associated with crime and unsavoury behaviour as it is understood among hip-hop artists in Grahamstown. The sharing culture among hip-hop artists here is informed by African personhood, which obliges particular duties related to sharing property with others with which one has a relationship (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001), so complicating a model for sharing in hip-hop based in the notion of a digital “commons” which is open to all (Haupt, 2008). These traditional notions of sharing and how they relate to digital goods require further research to situate them in relation to notions of the commons.

Lastly, the study reveals the potential and limitations of the digital in marginal spaces in the Global South. Liang (2005, p. 12) argues that pirate media networks allow marginal people from the postcolonial world who have been excluded from the “imaginary” of modernity, technology and the global economy to insert themselves into these networks. In Grahamstown hip-hop artists indeed use the digital (both mainstream and pirate) to insert themselves into such a global imaginary, whether this is in networking with other hip-hop artists offline and online around technical skills, imagining their emergence as musical entrepreneurs with large fan bases, or reimagining modernity through hybrid identities that incorporate high-tech media savvy selves with traditional African selves. Through their engagement with the digital the hip-hop artists are able to generate innovative digital communal practices in which they recombine, tinker with and repair equipment, so destabilising notions of innovation as invariably situated in the individual or the new (Burkus, 2013) and instead situating it within notions of the remix (M. Irvine, 2014). Despite such innovative digital practices and skills, hip-hop artists remain marginal in society, and are not able to translate these practices and skills into political or economic power. This is not only because of their marginal digital presence due to lack of access to digital infrastructure but also because of the real material restraints of everyday survival. Furthermore, the very particular habitus they cultivate is honed in response to the dominant concerns of township life, combining identities of the respectable citizen with the entrepreneur, the traditional African with the artist activist, and the form of pious musical expression this generates is not necessarily suited to the cultural capital of rebellious middleclass youth who drive success in

the music industry. This shows that digital skills in themselves are not sufficient to empower marginalised people.

8.3 Limitations of the research

The digital media practices of these young people should not be seen as typical of South African or indeed Grahamstown youth, as hip-hop artists seem to be early adopters (Rogers, 1983) particularly of computer technology in this space. There is, however, some suggestion that the sophistication of digital skills to be found in township yards is not unique to the hip-hop artists of Grahamstown's township communities, as a casual scrutiny of *Facebook* groups aligned to other towns and provinces suggest that similar digital practices are used by South African hip-hop artists in townships elsewhere. However, this does not mean that the findings collected here may be simply extended to the broader South African hip-hop community, since there may be several differences in other contexts.

The specific observations related to how computers are integrated into the digital media ecology may be related to the very specific conditions of a university town where computers circulate due to bulk university sell-offs of machines to workers and many student laptops enter grey markets. Due to the nature of the ethnographic method, which facilitated participation in social situations, observations were skewed towards activities in the backyard studio, where practices such as recording, image manipulation and beat-making were observed. Mobile phone practices, which tend to be more private, were largely gleaned from interviews and specific requests for demonstrations.

As described in the methodology chapter, a lack of fluency in the isiXhosa language was a constraint of this study, which placed limitations on the extent to which immediate links could be made between an analysis of lyrics during hip-hop cyphers. This was mitigated by identifying various hip-hop artists with a particular fluency in English, as well as engaging the help of interpreters from the hip-hop community and a professional translator. The study is furthermore limited in observing gender dynamics related to women since I could only recruit two women and one left the study early as she relocated to another town.

8.4 Recommendations for further research

Particularly within the field of ICT4D and the study of digital media, more research on how artists in the Global South use digital media may reveal interesting findings. This study has argued that artistic practices such as hip-hop that allow people to redefine themselves, enable

them to resist the constraining discourses of the dominant symbolic order and so act as powerful vehicles to enhance capability (Sen, 1999). Digital artistic practices thus enable agency, because they are entangled with powerful emotional concepts of self, community, hope and aspiration.

Another avenue for further research would be expanding research on digital technology in the Global South beyond the current focus on mobile phones and the mobile internet (e.g. Donner, 2015), and to consider these in conjunction with other technologies such as computers, DVD players, digital cameras, flash drives and hard drives. Such research will need to consider the digital materiality of objects and infrastructures in such spaces, and how these constrain and enable various practices. Here further research on the nature of the mobile internet in the Global South, the extent of its embeddedness in the marginal spaces of “pirate modernity” and a critical reflection on whether the internet here indeed enables inclusivity and voice, would extend the work of this study. Without further research describing marginal spaces of the internet, what I term the “ghetto internet”, it will not be possible to determine the usefulness of such spaces in enabling counter publics and the agency to mobilise social change based on the circulation of meaning in these spaces.

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