

Swag and *'cred'*: Representing Hip-hop in the African City

by

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Caroline Mose completed her doctorate from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London in July 2012 after successfully writing and defending her thesis on Popular Culture and Music. Her thesis on Kenyan Hip-hop investigated the various points of convergence between hip-hop culture and music on the one hand, and public life in Kenya on the other, including an analysis of the city as the major site within which hip-hop develops, and which shapes the very nature of the culture. In the thesis, she discussed the main issues of 'field' and symbolic capital (Bourdieu) and the idea that hip-hop culture can offer a counter-discourse that challenges (or reinforces) political and social stereotypes in Kenyan urban society. She also problematized some existing canons of hip-hop culture, including the idea that hip-hop is classified as either mainstream or underground, explored the language of gender in hip-hop, and analyzed the emerging aspect(s) of hip-hop and intellectual property discourse. She has previously been published in the ground-breaking *Native Tongues: An African Hip-hop Reader*, and in the forthcoming *Staging the Immaterial: Rights, Style and Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa*, among her other academic contributions.

Abstract

From its urban roots in 1970s and 80s America, hip-hop has grown exponentially through the processes encapsulated by transculturation (Morgan and Bennet, 2011), where cultural exchange is not just a hegemonic flow from the West to the global South, but an interchange and exchange that is complex and layered, the resultant effects being uniquely 'African' and at the same time 'global' in its self-expression and representation. The same can be said of the African (postcolonial) city, which according to Achille Mbembe, is first established as mimetic of the European city, which after a while acquires its own 'aura', a distinct characteristic that makes it truly 'African', even as it well maintains its colonial roots. As an urban cultural expression, hip-hop and the city are therefore copulatory, and hip-hop expression is itself a representation of the urban space.

My paper examines the ways in which African hip-hop represents itself and the urban space within which it exists. Using the specific example of Kenyan hip-hop in the city of Nairobi, I analyze the global hip-hop cultural and identity expressions of *swag*, and resultant *cred*, in demonstrating the complex linkages between the global and the local (glocal).

This is more relevant considering that a majority of hip-hop artists in the city of Nairobi have their personal roots in the sprawling area collectively referred to as 'Eastlands', an area east of the city which, during the colonial era, was reserved for native Kenyans who were allowed temporary accommodations there as they worked menial jobs in the 'white city'. This historic background, resonating with the origins of American hip-hop in the 'ghettos' of New York makes for interesting parallels in my analysis. What I am particularly interested in in this chapter is the way in which hip-hop artists in Nairobi, appealing to a mainly youthful audience, at first set about creating personal identities based on symbolic capital, and thereafter using that capital to define and re-define themselves in relation to a city that is continually being re-shaped by globalization and capitalism, and in locating themselves within the urban space that they seek to define.

Introduction

That hip-hop culture has gained prominence and acquired an unmistakable cultural capital, especially within urban areas in Africa is no longer contested.¹ We see its role in shaping, and being shaped by perceptions of, the urban space through its more visible element of rap music. Prominent American hip-hop scholars assert the undeniable connection between the city and hip-hop, specifically, the city space being the foundation upon which the culture is built. Murray Forman (2012b) for instance argues that

Rap music takes the city and its multiple spaces as the foundation of its cultural production. In the music and lyrics, the city is an audible presence, explicitly cited and digitally sampled in the reproduction of the aural textures of the urban environment (p. 250).

It is therefore my argument that an analysis of hip-hop in relation to the urban space within which it has grown and developed is necessary, and that the linkages between hip-hop and the city are inevitable. I further argue that despite its global nature, hip-hop gains its unique identity from one area to another because of the particular city within which it grows and develops worldwide. This is to say that every particular city – its spaces, its history, its socio-political and economic ethos – is unique, and as a result bestows these unique identities on hip-hop. At a simple level, the cityscape directly influences the content of hip-hop music; at a more complex level, the various city spaces provide sites within which different hip-hop ideals and identities are played, sometimes in conflicting ways that only serve to layer hip-hop culture and music with a particular city's unique character.

That hip-hop culture is defined by the cityscape is not confined only to Kenya. From its American base, hip-hop has been identified according to the various city spaces within which it has grown, including East coast, West coast and Dirty South, all as distinct as the cities they represent. A similar case can be made for African hip-hop where various local forms are unique and distinct – Ghana’s hip-life for instance (Shipley, 2009) has a different texture to Tanzania’s *Bongo Flava* (Casco, 2006; Perullo, 2012; Omari, 2011) – and the case can be made that these differences rest on the character of each respective city space that these hip-hop forms develop in.

This narrows our focus down to the African state (especially postcolonial states) and what I call the ‘quadruple heritage’. Ali Mazrui (2005) has made a case for the ‘triple heritage’ where African countries have the unmistakable characteristic echoes of traditional culture, colonialism and religion (Christian and Muslim). I would add a fourth dimension of globalization to form a quadruple heritage which gives rich intertextual templates for an analysis of popular culture, and in this case, hip-hop. From the wider locus of the state, my interest focuses even more closely on one African city – Nairobi. The city of Nairobi, which is Kenya’s economic and political capital, has infused the very identity of hip-hop culture and music, including influencing its discourses through its various spaces, both real and imagined. Nairobi hip-hop is also distinct from that in other cities in the country, as Andrew Eisenberg’s research into Mombasa hip-hop strongly suggests (Eisenberg, 2010).² The latter is more Arabesque owing to the coastal region of Kenya being heavily influenced by Arab culture in the pre-colonial era and currently, by Islam, as has also been argued for Tanzania’s coastal cities and islands (Omari, 2011).³

Locating Nairobi hip-hop in Nairobi

Nairobi hip-hop can be located within a cityscape that is fraught with tensions that date back to the colonial era (K’Akumu O.A. and Olima, 2007). The colonial city, argues Achille Mbembe, is first established as *mimicry* of a European city, imagining itself to be an English town, a ‘pale reflection of forms born elsewhere [...] a European city in a European country in Africa’ (2004: 375-376). Its spatial ordering, he further states, reflects the feelings of its colonial and racial occupants, fulfilling their every amenity, but keeping the undesirable native out save only for those allowed to venture in to perform its menial chores. Even then, this native is not allowed to live in the same area as his white masters, but is compelled to make his temporary living quarters on the periphery of the city. At its inception, the colonial city is clearly divided into two distinct areas – the centre, which is inhabited by those with economic and political power (the colonial government offices and residence) – and the peripheral, native quarters which house the native labour supply of the centre. This spatial, racial ordering, according to Mbembe, is the foundation of the colonial (African) city. The city gradually evolves through *mimesis* (what Mbembe defines as a ‘capacity to identify oneself or establish similarities with something else while at the same time inventing something original’ pp. 376) and finally gains its own ‘aura’ or a unique identity, as a modern city (pp. 373-377). However, this spatial order of the colonial city forms a foundation upon which the postcolonial city establishes itself.

Discussing Johannesburg, Mbembe's analysis can be applied to Nairobi, which was the seat of the colonial administration in British East Africa. Roger Kurtz (1998) writes that

Nairobi offered a perfect opportunity for colonial authorities to experiment with urban planning [...] on the one hand to create a model of the Garden City, a concept that was becoming important in British urban planning at the end of the 19th century; and on the other hand to create an essentially European city in the African setting based on the South African model (pp. 77)

Established in 1899 as a depot on the Mombasa-Kampala railway line as a city mimetic of Britain's cities, Nairobi became the colonial seat of power of British East Africa by 1907 (White et. al., 1948; Obudho and Aduwo, 1992; Situma, 1992). Its layout was based on racial segregation and maintenance of the purity of the white class (Mitullah, 1992). Mbembe argues that this spatial ordering is intrinsically European and is based on a 'capitalist, rational sphere linked to the idea of civilization', where 'civilization' directly refers to the societies living within a city (that is, the centre). Specifically, he states that 'the idea of the metropolis in European thought has always been linked to that of "civilization" (a form of existence as well as a structure of time) and 'capitalist rationalization' (2004: 373). This means that the city is imagined first as a place where civilization is played out in day to day living (culture) and the making of capital, including business and commerce; and also as a distinction between a particular self and an othered place, or othered self. In Nairobi, Africans who were not confined to the rural areas were relegated to racially segregated⁴ workers' quarters in the eastern part of the city, an area characterised by temporary, informal living structures with limited social amenities such as sewage disposal, piped water and electricity (Mitullah, 1992; Kurtz, 1998). Over time and with increased rural-urban migration especially after independence from colonial rule in 1963, these informal housing estates expanded, but social amenities did not develop accordingly.

Nairobi has now grown into a huge metropolis (it is the largest and most populous city in East Africa) and is still one of the major economic, diplomatic and political centres of East and Central Africa. Moreover, the emergence of economic classes, including a burgeoning middle class⁵ has blurred the colonial lines between the city and the periphery, part of Mbembe's 'aura'. However, its colonial legacy can still be noted (Ntarangwi, 2007). Unlike South African cities which after the end of apartheid maintained a racial aura, Nairobi is not necessarily defined by its race as by its economic dynamics, epitomised by its noticeable wealth gap. Businessmen, politicians, expatriates and a few *KCs* ('Kenyan Cowboys', Nairobi's descendants of former colonial settlers) make up the city's wealthy, those who live in the so-called leafy suburbs⁶, which are areas West of the city centre characterized by opulent housing and large compounds. On the other side of town are the informal settlements, Nairobi's inner city estates that have burgeoned from the much smaller colonial-era native quarters into sprawling informal settlements housing thousands of city dwellers, many drawn to the city via migration (Mitullah, 2003). These estates are collectively referred to as Eastlands.

Locating and Positioning the Hip-hop Artist in Nairobi

Incidentally, a majority of existing and upcoming hip-hop artists in Nairobi lay claim to having their homes and/or origins in Eastlands. A contributing factor to this is the global metanarrative of hip-hop and its undisputed origins in the inner city of 1970s America (Chang, 2005; KRS One, 2003; Toop, 2000; Rose, 1994) as a site for both protest and pleasure. Hip-hop culture worldwide seems to have taken this route owing to the potential of hip-hop to colour the urban imagination with the idea of protest and an agitation for change, a quality that initially attracted hip-hop artists in Nairobi. While these estates are not wholly defined by realities of extreme lack and deprivation, they are representative of an unmistakable degree of poverty. Dandora is the official dumping ground of the city's waste, and the Blacksmith Institute's *'The World's Worst Toxic Pollution Problems Report 2011'* places it as one of the most polluted places on the planet.

This is the backdrop within which these Kenyan artists find themselves; products of a colonial past that seems to be maintained in the postcolony. This colonial 'past-present' means a majority of artists, like their 1970s American counterparts, have limited formal education and market-based skills that can enable them find decent work in the city. A number are jobless, stuck in the city for a number of reasons, chief among them rural-urban migration by their parents and grandparents. This migration is particularly important in understanding the perception of the city by these artists. Many artists call the neighborhoods of Eastlands both 'home' and '*ocha*', the latter a Sheng⁷ word meaning 'upcountry home'.

The upcountry home, or '*ocha*,' is one that features prominently in Kenyan discourse. It is the place where young people living in the city are consigned to during the school vacations in order to maintain roots with their cultures and traditions, based on the idea that the urban centre is characterized by chaos and immorality (Mbembe, 2004). The upcountry home, *ocha*, therefore becomes the place to which people flee to cleanse themselves of the excesses of the city. The older generation usually refers to '*ocha*' as '*nyumbani*', or 'home' (ancestral home), which is the place where one retires to after spending years working in the city, and where one gets buried, preferably, next to a house one has built using the resources garnered in the city during the long years of work. This attachment to the rural home can be explained as an attachment to one's place of belonging, a place where one's roots can be traced (Geschiere and Gugler, 1998). While the attachments the older generation feels for *ocha* cannot be the same as the attachments youth have (Wa Mungai, 2007), they still exist in the latter group in surprising ways. This is demonstrated by artist Alaholla's popular song '*Ocha*', where he states '*maisha imepanda siwezi, sukari imepanda siwezi [...] narudi ocha*', which means 'the cost of living in the city has gone up, I can't manage any longer, so I am going back to my upcountry home'. The song demonstrates a key awareness of the significance of *ocha* over the city. Therefore, where one confesses that the inner city is also one's *ocha*, it becomes clear the attachment one feels towards this home, and further, the trapped feeling one gets having no alternative/ancestral home.

There is also the morbid fear that comes through in various conversations where some of these young people, caught up in crime, get killed and subsequently buried at Lang'ata cemetery⁸, one of Nairobi's public cemeteries and increasingly, the epitome of being the final resting place of those with no 'ocha' to retreat to in death. These conversations only point to the significance of the Eastlands inner city estate as the seat of these anxieties within the city space, while the complicated relationship of both attachment to, and loathing of, the inner city, poses an interesting backdrop for analysing how the hip-hop artist navigates it and various other city spaces.

Representing Swag and Cred: Defining Artistic Cachet in Spatial Articulation

In many ways, African hip-hop, like the colonial city, first starts out as mimetic, imagining itself an extension of an American or western form of localized hip-hop (Rebensdorf, 1997). But just like the city, it acquires its own special and unique aura and identity that is unmistakably African. It then equally bestows that aura on the hip-hop artist, who must master its intricacies in order to build an identity that can communicate to an audience relevantly over a period of time. This is because the artist sees himself as representative of a certain demographic within the city. Jesse Shipley argues that a hip-hop artist sees himself as a 'legitimate social and political critic' (2009: 642). I would add that by extension, the artist sees himself as an ambassador, representing the views and desires of his audience in the city by articulating its views. This representation, which is called '*repping*' in hip-hop lingo, is important in shaping the identity of an artist, and in his positioning within the city. As rapper Bamboo has stated in his song '*One Blood*', he 'represents like the Pope *reps* the Vatican'. Similarly, rapper Mwafrika articulates repping in his song '*Justice*' when he claims to represent or speak for those who have been oppressed by a biased justice system. Mwafrika equates himself to a local religious leader, the Catholic Archbishop Mwana'a Nzeki, cognizant of the latter's spiritual role (to pray/speak for his people), and implying his (Mwafrika) own role to be similar.

The idea of representing, or '*repping*' is part of the global and local hip-hop metanarrative. Hip-hop artists see themselves as representatives of a marginalized, youthful audience at the heart of the city. Christopher Holmes Smith defines *repping*, or 'represent' as 'the self-embodiment of one's value system concerning power, success, and individual/communal acclaim [...]to literally become that which one names as oneself, against all the odds' (Smith, 1997: 347). His definition underscores the point that in charting an identity for himself within the city space that influences it, the artist makes claims that represent both his individual and communal aspirations. Therefore, two strands of narratives take shape in hip-hop discourse – the individual, and the communal claims. Both strands are intertwined in the sense that in making the individual declarations about personal identity, the artist gains cachet to represent his mainly youthful and marginalized community.⁹

The term 'youth' is in many cases a contested and fluid term. In Kenyan hip-hop reportage and scholarship, and in the public imagination, the term 'youth' not only denotes inexperience, but also chaos, violence and crime. David Anderson (2002) and Peter Kagwanja (2003; 2005) for instance outline the formation of 'youth gangs' as vigilante armies used by politicians for protection and to intimidate, or even eliminate, competitors. More recently is the 2007/8 post-election violence, where young (mostly men) perpetrated acts of bloodshed.¹⁰ Youth also denotes vitality and energy in more general terms, or comparatively, it can mean one who is of lesser age than another who is quite advanced in years. Amy Siciliano (2007) discusses the framing of 'urban outcasts', most of whom are youth, as objects of 'cultural otherness' and symptoms of the ills of the city space. Siciliano's argument demonstrates that the markers of 'youth', especially references to age or social status, relegate their bearer to the fringes of societal power and status. Mbugua Wa Mungai states that hip-hop artists are 'a part of a broader marginalized social category [...] (whose) anxieties [...] are hardly understood by the older people' (2007: 52). These anxieties place them in a position where representation is crucial for the articulation of their anxieties and aspirations. However, these views of a marginalized and therefore seemingly helpless youth can be considered core-centric and unsophisticated as they perpetuate suggestions of the lack of agency among 'youth'. As Smith points out, in charting an identity as a *rep*, the hip-hop artist gains power, which becomes representative of the power inherent among those he speaks for, in this case, a marginalized societal group. However, artists do not automatically become reps of their peers, but have to earn the honours and continually maintain them in a vastly changing cityscape. I have identified two key qualities that an artist must carefully cultivate in order to be considered a *rep*, or a dusty foot philosopher so to speak – these are swagger (or *swag*¹¹), and *street cred*.

Swag is an acquired identity marker, or the aura that an artist identifies himself with (Shipley, 2009). The urban online dictionary describes '*swag*' as 'the things that define a person's character; how someone goes about things; the way someone sounds when they talk; -what they say when they say it; style of their movement; the lasting impression you have of that person'. In my research, I define '*swag*' as '*the element or component, made up of braggadocio, lyrical and performance skill that first, gives an artist a unique 'street' identity and secondly, a symbolic capital that gains him the credibility crucial in producing a hip hop aesthetic and being representative of a marginalized periphery*'. By periphery, I allude to Wa Mungai's conceptualization of youth as a social category marginalization from power, wealth and resources. This marginalized class in its various forms is what hip-hop artists claim to represent.¹² While a number of low-income housing estates exist outside Eastlands, including the (in)famous Kibera 'slum' and Kawangware areas west of the city, a majority of low to lower-middle income housing estates are in Eastlands, as are the artists who represent them.

Swag is acquired through a number of processes, among them, using the already established *swag* of another artist, usually, American rappers, by either doing *collabos*¹³ with them, curtain-raising for them, or by sampling their songs. For example, artist Jua Cali raised his *swag* substantially after curtain-raising for American rapper The Game who was on tour in Kenya in November 2008.¹⁴

Curtain-raisers are artists who come onto a stage to perform a set of songs in order to prepare the audience for the main performer that the audience has paid to come and watch. Similarly, Kalamashaka artists, on producing the song 'All Over the World' in collaboration with Rha Goddess, an American female political rapper, increased their *swag* tenfold. The song was played on MTV Base and on Channel O and increased Kalamashaka's visibility in Kenya and the wider East Africa region.

On the other hand, *street cred* is the legitimacy an artist acquires for himself with his peers, and with his audience or public, which gives him the right to make declarations through his music, and make commentaries through various media. Pepper Miller and Herb Kemp define *cred* as 'having respect from your peers [...] being recognized and respected by (your) own people [...] having influence' (Miller and Kemp, 2006: 72). The difference between *swag* and *cred* is that the former is an identity marker, while the latter is about exerting that identity as influence. Miller and Kemp also point out that the terms mean different things to different people, in different contexts. So for an artist, *cred* is the means by which he has the impetus to articulate the issues he feels to be pertinent to himself and to his audience, which is what gives him that credibility in the first place. However, in a business sense, *cred* is what is used to create an appeal for certain commodities to certain audiences that normally would not bother to notice that commodity (pp. 72-73). That appeal stems from the respect and influence that the artist has among his peers and audiences.

Implicit here are two main points. First, we see the beginnings of the complex relationship between the city and the artist – the artist finds he exists in a complex, capitalistic environment (which is the basic principle upon which the city is built) and in which he must play several roles; cultivating a *swag* which contributes to his *cred*, which he must in turn use to *rep*, to philosophize, to provide a counter-hegemonic discourse (Haupt, 2003). Second, Bourdieu's ideas of capital combine with Gramsci's concepts of organic intellectualism within these hip-hop aesthetics of *swag* and *cred*. The hip-hop artist begins to build his artistic cachet, or symbolic capital, which puts him in a position to articulate, or philosophize, particular issues, or *rep*. Therefore, *repping*, *swag* and *cred* become articulated through capital and counter-hegemony, indicating a combination of roles that the hip-hop artist must juggle. However, these roles do not always go well together, and they keep shifting in a fluid cityscape. These shifts are the focus of my analysis – how the artist navigates this multi-layered city, how he defines it, and how he employs his acquired capital within various spaces in the city.

Hip-hop's (re)Reading of the (African, postcolonial) City

The African postcolonial city has been 'read', ironically, along the parameters that Mbembe problematizes above – as a spatial 'post-colonial' entity in comparison to, and defined by, its European origin. The city is seen to mimic its imagined origin, which can be noted by its striving to come up to par with European cities in terms of its physical infrastructure; and by the stark differences and tensions between 'urban' and 'rural' Africa in general. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004) argue that

...ways of seeing and reading contemporary African cities are still dominated by the metanarrative of urbanization, modernization, and crisis... (*and therefore most studies*)... have read the city as nothing but the spatial embodiment of unequal economic relations and coercive and segregationist policies. The city's fabric has been described as a structure in need of radical transformation and only rarely as an expression of an aesthetic vision. In so doing, these studies have forgotten that to a large extent, the city (in Africa and elsewhere) has historically been one of the most privileged sites "if not of the emergence of the question of the subject in the modern sense of the word," then at least of its articulation to reason and sensation. (p. 353) (*Italics mine*).

The result, they point out, is a reading and understanding of the African city in the light of its proletarian – that is, its hawkers, slum dwellers, its subaltern. To counter the discourses produced by this type of approach, they call for in their paper new ways of reading the African city, specifically, by reading the textualities of its interfaces instead of its modernities (or lack thereof). Ranka Primorac similarly advocates a reading of the city as aesthetic, or text, (2008). To Primorac, the African city is itself a text, through its many contextual spaces where discourse is created and furthered, via imagined and subjective realities and identities. Hip-hop culture presents us with an opportunity of (re)reading both itself and the cityscape through the textualities and intertextualities both present us at the same time. Nairobi's rich diversities with regards to its socio-political and economic dynamics conflate with the rich diversities of hip-hop culture which is intrinsically linked to Nairobi *the city*.

In previous studies, hip-hop in Nairobi has been seen as the embodiment of the subaltern (Nyairo, 2005), focusing on the subaltern spaces of the city that artists occupy. Nairobi has also been read as the 'slum city', with images of the 'Kibera slum' encapsulating its identity,¹⁵ making it the destination of choice for charity workers, humanitarian organizations, film makers, fashion designers, academic researchers, and tourists in a strange turn dubbed 'slum tourism'¹⁶. The use of the term 'slums' has also been uncritically accepted in its popular usage in this context, creating a problematic language in the analysis of the post-colonial city. However, new scholarship on the special relationship between the city and hip-hop is creating new paradigms for a fresh and more nuanced analysis.

For hip-hop music, the city is conceptualized in three main ways. First, is the idea of the ‘glocal’ – where the ‘global’ comes together with the ‘local’. In this perspective, the city is seen through an expanded vision of Blackness, where an international Black tradition is manifested in the local space; local and national borders are erased, and the city becomes an extension of a global Black experience (Forman, 2012a). While Mbembe and Nuttall both critique the global-local nexus that essentializes the local space by setting it in a comparative discourse with a superior global (2004), Forman (2012a) points out that the international Black traditions in question here are not those of a ‘single tradition of essentialist Blackness’ but rather, in line with Morgan and Bennett’s (2011) argument that conceptualizes ‘glocalization’ as

...the movement of hip-hop between local and global contexts [...] that is, simultaneously engaging the intersections of global and local dynamics. [...] glocalization involves a recontextualization of cultural forms through “local” appropriations of a globally acceptable cultural model “that are then integrated into a new social context”. (p. 181).

Similarly, Wa Mungai argues that ‘youth culture trains its gaze outwards from the local to the global in order to look back into the local’ (2007: 48), giving a sense of a continuous flow in both directions. This gives us room to see the global-local nexus beyond a singular comparative interpretation, to considering the various meanings that are evoked in the local space by local artists themselves through global mediums. For example, the Nairobi artist perceives the local space in the light of ‘origin of hip-hop’¹⁷ and therefore, the starting point of the conversation of hip-hop culture and music; while the global is viewed as the place of transformation, through its technological tools, of old (read African/bardic traditions) into modern hip-hop. The local space is not just confined to the borders of Kenya, but to a wider, imagined African space. This linkage is put more aptly by veteran Kalamashaka rapper Rawbar when he says ‘*wali-borrow hip-hop yetu ya mababu zetu, unacheiki, na sisi sasa tume-borrow yao vile wamei advance na mabeats na production na vitu kama hizo*’¹⁸ (they [the West] borrowed our original hip-hop from our forefathers you see, and now we have re-claimed this new version with its beats, production styles and all that). When he says ‘*yetu*’, or ‘ours’, he does not merely mean ‘Kenyan’, but ‘African’, viewing his local space as continent-wide. Therefore, the expanded vision of Blackness or African-ness in this case, spreads out from the immediate local space, traversing the continent to the West. This global-local (or glocal) nexus crops up vividly in hip-hop discourse on the city.

Second is what Forman (2012b) terms as the ‘discursive field featuring spatialized themes of intense locality’ (p. 258) where intensified spatial terminology of the local cityscape coalesces around the idea of the ‘hood’. ‘Hood’ is the colloquial reduction of ‘neighbourhood’ and is representative of the immediate locale of the user of the term. In Nairobi, the term ‘hood’ is invariably used by hip-hop artists together with the terms ‘ghetto’, ‘slum’ and the Sheng word ‘*mtaa*’ to mean the inner city neighbourhoods of Eastlands. Githiora (2003) asserts that the term *mtaa*

... carries a specific and narrower sense than the Standard Swahili meaning of 'suburb' or 'town quarter'. In Sheng and Nairobi Swahili, mtaa refers to low income, city council housing estates concentrated in the Eastlands, a section of the city that emerged during the colonial period as a reserved area for African workers living in the city. Some also call it the 'ghetto' (p. 160)

While 'ghetto' and 'slum' are terms with problematic, racial origins evoking discourses of exclusion, they have been appropriated in the local space much the same way the racial epithet 'nigger' has also been appropriated (most certainly by Nairobi youth) as 'nigga', a term of familiarity in both friendly terms, and in moments of ire.¹⁹ Hip-hop artists in Nairobi call their Eastlands homes 'hood' or 'ghetto'. On occasion, the word 'slum' is used in song lyrics to evoke the same meaning. Themes on the 'hood' as a city space of itself are prevalent in hip-hop and are deliberately used to offer familiarity and 'provide the perspectival point from which one gazes upon and evaluates other places, places that are "other" or foreign to one's own distinctly personal sites of security and stability' (Forman, 2012b: 260). This 'other' space in my view starts immediately outside the 'hood' itself, and begins with the wider city (that is, the centre), which is the site upon which colonial policies of exclusion are still being practiced.

This 'other' space marks the third reading of the city space that I have identified from my research, that is, the liminal spaces between the 'hood' and the perceived 'centre' of the city itself. In the popular imagination in Nairobi, there exists a difference between the 'hood' and the city centre and its leafy suburbs, a colonial continuity. The reality of this perceived difference features in my analysis of hip-hop in Nairobi.

The City as Glocal

In reading the city as glocal, hip-hop envisions a city, and itself, as a product of both the local and the global in a constant flow of culture. Song lyrics depict this imagination, inevitably taking on a comparative discourse in this culture flow. On one hand, the local is seen in the light of the origin of cultural and popular icons, and therefore, colored with pride. On the other, the local space is criticized using a global lens in an attempt to make it conform to the standards of the imagined (global) city. In other words, the local space is seen as existing within a wider global locus that extends country-wide, continent-wide and internationally. In these types of songs, artists address these local audiences by calling out to '*wakenya*' (Kenyans), '*waafrika*' (Africans) and even the 'human race'. For instance, rapper Nonini laments the killing of Albino people in Tanzania and Kenya by addressing both the local and global in the song '*Colour kwa face*' (skin color).

hii ni rangi tu usidanganywe, mi ni mtu normal This is just color, don't be fooled, I am normal
uwe mzungu, mwarabu ama uwe mchina White, Arab, or Chinese
uwe mjaluo, mkikuyu au muajentina Luo, Kikuyu, Argentinean, this is the time to
huu ndio wakati wa kucelebrate zetu celebrate our differences
tofauti
tuje pamoja tuimbe wimbo ongeza sauti Let's come together and sing a song out loud
Hii ni story ya human race This is the story of the human race, of color and
hii ni story ya colour na race race
hii mentality, tuna erase We must erase the mentality (of discrimination)

Nonini addresses a local problem ('local' starting from Nairobi to Tanzania in this case) by taking a glocal position. The cityscape, which harbors people committing brutal murders is given a lesson in tolerance, and further, is 'outed' when Nonini addresses a global audience and tells on the local in a bid to publicize these murders, aiming to ultimately stop them. Nonini also attempts to paint the human race within this glocal nexus as equal by calling out local ethnicities (Luo, Kikuyu) alongside disparate world cultures, juxtaposing ethnic hostilities in the local space with racial ones on the global one.

Rapper VBO does something similar in his track '*Prezzo wangu*' (my president) whose chorus goes

Prezzo wangu ni mwack, na gava iko stuck My president is useless and the government is stuck
Ma-minister wanasunda ganji ndani ya ministers are stuffing money into their rotund
one pack bellies
Wa-kenya tumelack chakula tuna-lack Kenyans lack everything, even food
Ma-minister wamesunda ganji ndani ya Ministers are stuffing money into their Swiss
Swiss bank bank accounts
Ma MP ni ma-junk wanajaza tu tank MPs are junk, they are only filling their tanks
Tulie vijanaa na wazee tuwa-sack Let's cry out, we youth, and sack these old men

Here, VBO uses Young Jeezy's '*My President*', an ode to president Obama when it became apparent he would become the first African American president in the White House (Neal, 2012). In doing this, VBO first bequeaths himself *swag* extended from Young Jeezy, and from the reference to President Obama, whose racial origins resonate with Kenyans.

Thereafter, VBO defines the post-election-violence city that is Nairobi by critiquing the new coalition government that seems stuck in a cycle of internal conflict and corruption, accusing politicians of self-aggrandizement. Finally, he cements his identity as a representative of a peripheral view that is similar to that expressed in the song, and the *swag* he has claimed, together with his stinging and explicit critique cements his *cred* and his *repping*. His claim to the presidency through attaching the article of ownership '*prezzo wangu*' or 'my president' gives him an unmistakable stamp of authority that says he can criticize the president as is necessary because he is *his* president, and by extension, so is the presidency, which is not a personal title belonging to its bearer, but to the rapper, representative of the wider nation. This is confirmed in the line where VBO (calling himself VBO MP) asks young voters to 'sack' these corrupt and self-serving politicians. The Obama subtext in the song suggests that despite the chaos, order and greatness can be achieved by the youth as did a (youthful) Obama in ascending to the White House. The use of the American slang word '*whack*' (translating to 'useless'), becomes representative of the global-local nexus the song represents with reference to the cityscape. In the second verse, VBO locates the song, with its global aura, within the local space by mentioning seven political and economic scandals that have featured in Kenyan public discourse, citing them as an example of continued corruption in government. The mention of these scandals locates the present/local in the song even as it extends far beyond Nairobi and Kenya's borders. It is little wonder that this particular song was banned from being aired on mainstream radio in Kenya in 2008-9.²⁰ The song can currently only be found in video format tucked away on VBO's Facebook page.

Similarly, rapper Juliani also procures a glocal gaze in '*Mtaa Mentality*' by commenting on a (local) protagonist who is in search of a Green Card so that he can migrate to America in order to make wealth 'like Bill Gates' and date women 'like Vivica Fox'. This protagonist is representative of many people searching for ways to relocate to a utopian West in order to improve their lives economically. Juliani critiques this flight to the West by expressing his wish to 'improve from being a hustler to being a baller' within the local space so that he can be as famous as Biggie Smalls (Notorious B.I.G) and Tupac (Tupac Shakur), both slain, world-renowned rappers. Interestingly, Juliani uses global, iconic figures of Bill Gates, Biggie Smalls and Tupac to conjure up imagery of wealth and influence possible in the local space. The city therefore becomes an entity existing within a glocal space in these seamless narratives.

Hip-hop and the City as Local

In reading the city as intensely local, the hip-hop artist imagines his locale, the 'hood, in certain ways, and imagines himself in a certain light. The city spaces of the 'hood take on various meanings, from the nuanced to the clichéd. For instance, MC Kah's '*Dandora L.O.V.E*' re-imagines Dandora, already smeared as being the city's dumpsite and one of an internationally noted toxicity. MC Kah a member of Ukoo Flani Mau Mau starts his song by declaring he is in '*Dandora L.O.V.E, ndani ya hip-hop city*' (inside Dandora, the hip-hop city). MC Kah re-imagines Dandora as the birth place of Kenyan hip-hop, the first 'hood to produce hip-hop artists in the country, therefore historicizing Dandora beyond poverty and the dump.

He goes as far as calling himself and his Ukoo Flani Mau Mau counterparts the ‘ghetto philosophers’ and the ‘VIPs of Dandora’ in the song, lending himself a *cred to rep*. Dandora, despite its hardships, becomes the crucible in which MC Kah and his Ukoo Flani counterparts hone their unmatched hip-hop skills. MC Kah’s view of Dandora also debunks its earlier description in Kalamashaka’s *Tafsiri Hii*, in which they declare ‘*maisha kule D ni mazii*’ (life in Dandora is terrible). *Dandora L.O.V.E*, released in 2007 (re)members *Tafsiri Hii*, released in 1998 during the advent of hip-hop culture in Kenya, seeking to re-imagine Dandora differently, even claiming a love for it.

However, rapper duo Mashifta, also of Ukoo Flani, view the immediate local – the hood, as existing within a wider locus of a (local) system that is corrupt, dishonest and despotic. Their famous song ‘*Majambazi*’ (criminals) critiques politicians, policemen and religious leaders as ‘majambazi’, out to rob and fleece their congregants and followers. They criticize corrupt policemen who demand bribes from every person they meet; corrupt clergy men who collect tithes for self-gain, and politicians who never deliver on their campaign promises but proceed to bleed public coffers for self-gain. But at the end of their refrain, they concede in a moment of honest self-reflection that ‘*na sisi pia vijana wa ghetto majambazi*’, meaning ‘even we, ghetto youth, are also criminals’. This self-imagery can be read as a multi-layered character of the city – in bemoaning the state of the ‘system’, they also confess to perpetuating it by participating in its corrupt nature. Far from reading these lyrics as a simple character of a city that is corrupt and teeming with *majambazi*, I see a subtext that imagines the city space as one of equality – Mashifta mention professionals like lawyers, clergymen, politicians and the police, all out to enrich themselves – but they also consider themselves as part of that system, not outside it, pointing at an imagining of the city as one presenting equal opportunity. The hip-hop artist in the ‘ghetto’ therefore does not see himself as marginalized, but part of a larger system which, albeit corrupt, is all-inclusive, and in which the hip-hop artist can mention himself in the same breath as a lawyer or a politician. The use of the word *majambazi* is also significant of the popular sentiment that everyone with access to wealth or good jobs must have gotten these through underhand means, painting everyone with a well-paying or prominent job (lawyers, politicians, government officials) as corrupt and therefore, *majambazi*. In this sense, Mashifta’s use of the term can also be read as an attempt at pulling themselves up to par with these well-positioned individuals within the cityscape, thereby deconstructing the idea of the marginalized and poor urban youth.

Nazizi, Kenya’s ‘first lady of hip-hop’ (currently a cross-over reggae/ragga artist), sees herself within the city space as ‘*First Lady kwa beat kama hii iki-pump kwa ma-streets za Nairobi robbery town tuki-represent wa-she na wadhii*’ (I am the first lady of hip-hop like this song, pumping in the streets of Nairobi robbery town, as we represent the girls and the boys’). These are lyrics from the song ‘*Hip-hop Halisi*’ (hip-hop proper) performed by Nazizi and rappers from Ukoo Flani. Here, Nazizi sees herself and Ukoo Flani as *repping* the youth within the city, referring to her own cachet as the ‘first lady of hip-hop’ in harnessing her street *cred* and *swag*.

She reminds listeners that female rappers in Kenya are few and far between, and largely absent from the public domain, pointing at her own longevity as a rapper (first, and current, lady of hip-hop). Her placing of 'wa-she' (the girls) before 'wadhii' (the boys) in her lyric with no visible rhyme scale is also indicative of her feminist ideal, and her need to deconstruct the idea of 'youth' (or *mavijanaa* in commonly used Sheng) from an amorphous and largely invisible mass to the more specific 'girls and boys', thereby giving those she (and Ukoo Flani) 'represents' a certain definite gendered identity. Her reference to Nairobi as 'robbery town' is reminiscent of K-South's first album 'Nairobi' produced in 2002 in which the city is conceptualized in the same way as Mashifta see it in '*Majambazi*'. In as much as she reads the city as one touched by crime, she also draws on the *cred* of K-South, who together with Kalamashaka (also members of Ukoo Flani) were the first hip-hop artists in Nairobi in the late 1990s. She therefore equates herself, being the first lady of hip-hop, with K-South, who were among the first rappers in the city. The idea of *repping*, and wielding personal *cred* by drawing on the swag of other artist is demonstrated here within the cityscape. This is similar to the first reading where the local artist draws on the *swag* and *cred* of an American artist, not to diminish his own identity, but to equalize himself with it and create an unmistakable *cred* and capital in the local space.

The In-between Spaces of the City

'Na-hustle juu chini ili nivuke boda, wananigeukia' (I try to work hard to cross the border, but they turn on me)- Artist Jaguar in his hit song '*Kigeugeu*'- 2010

The above song by the artist Jaguar paints the picture of an imaginary border that exists and demarcates certain areas of the city from others, based on wealth and property. Nyairo (2005) argues that the 1999 song '*4-in-1*' by artist Ndarling P describes the invisible line of demarcation between the inner city informal estate of Mukuru kwa Njenga (what she calls the 'poverty zone') into the more middle-class estate of Buruburu. Both estates are in Eastlands, sitting next to each other, though their topography is contrasting, akin to Foucault's concept of 'heterotopias' where one city space contrasts sharply with its immediate neighbour in appearance and form. In *4-in-1*, Ndarling P thinks about 'crossing the poverty line' from Mukuru to Buruburu, even though he emphasizes his pride in belonging to the 'hood of Mukuru.

Though the 'we versus them' concept is now considered a dated concept, there is merit in the argument that many hip-hop artists today are taking up these essentialized identities in reading their city spaces. Similar to artists identifying themselves as 'underground' in order to gain legitimacy because previous hip-hop scholarship has picked it out as the 'serious' genre of hip-hop (Mose, 2011), these same artists have employed in their music discourses of the centre/marginalized narrative in their interpretation of the city. Kelley (2012) argues that the taking up of these identities is a direct result of the essentialist discourses that research has employed in its analysis of the 'hood's occupants (or what he terms as the 'real nigga'). These essentialized identities create an in-between space that is rooted in economic upward or downward mobility.

According to Mbembe, the modern city is, above all, a product of capitalism (2004), meaning that the market becomes its centre, drawing in all players within it into the making of capital. Hip-hop artists are not exempt. At its core, hip-hop in itself is an industry with the potential for making money for its various players, that is, artists, producers and marketers, and radio presenters who air the music. Discussing hip-hop as a business model, Jesse Shipley (2009) argues that hip-hop ‘demonstrates a performative product whose value and circulation relies solely on the skills of the artist’, further adding that ‘salesmanship and effective lyrical performance marks how (hip-hop) aligns with entrepreneurship’. Shipley here points at the artistic skill that makes hip-hop as a commodity valuable, and this skill is hinged on the *cred* and *swag* of the artist. To Shipley, *swag* and *cred* equate to entrepreneurship. Mickey Hess (2007) thinks the same when he states that

Hip-hop is big business, and these rappers are entrepreneurs who seek to maintain control of their product, both in financial and artistic terms, using street smarts to negotiate contracts that allow them more control than was granted to earlier Black rock and roll and blues musicians (p. 13).

In a later work, Hess points out that the hip-hop artist cannot be accepted as being wealthy if he does not have a disadvantaged background of living in the ‘ghetto’ (2012), and artists must be seen to have overcome systemic racism and abject poverty as part of their ‘meteoric rise’ to fame. For the Kenyan hip-hop artist, having roots in Eastlands gives the rapper *street cred*, a certain legitimacy that allows him to speak about the hardships and marginalizations in the ‘hood. This legitimacy in constructing hip-hop identities comes about when ‘hip-hop artists authenticate themselves to listeners by describing how they came to their careers, and how their lives intersect with their music’ (Hess, 2012: 637). In Nairobi, rappers seeing themselves as ‘real’ or authentic construct various ‘hardship-based’ background stories, some true and some grossly exaggerated, all aimed at cementing their *cred*. An example is the rapper Garang adopting the name of slain Southern Sudanese leader John Garang de Mabior, therefore appropriating the identity of a ‘hard-core’ and ‘gangsta’ individual and survivor of a ‘real’ war. Somali-born and Kenyan-bred rapper K’Naan does the same in his song ‘TIA’ (This is Africa) where he taunts American gangsta rappers, telling them that what they deem to be ‘hard-core’ would pale in comparison if he took them to the ‘tricky sticky icky alley ways’ of Mogadishu, where real hard-core men fight real wars with torpedoes.²¹ K’Naan has constructed his identity as a rapper who escaped Somali’s lawlessness and the tyrannical reign of terrorist warlords.²²

These claims to authenticity are linked with the harnessing of *cred* and *swag*, and how these aesthetic qualities shift once an artist is no longer based at the city space that gave him that legitimacy in the first place. This is because increasingly, artists in Kenya are debunking the notion that ‘artists cannot make money from their music’. While Kuenzler discusses how piracy in Africa has crippled the music business (2006), and Shipley also points out how hiplife (Ghana’s version of hip-hop) artists in Ghana have had difficulties raking in sales from their music (2009), these claims can no longer be taken at face value.

Kenyan artists are using their *cred* and *swag* to make money through their music. Popular artists sell their music in significant numbers – artist Doobeez aka Abbas has reported selling over 300,000 copies of his K-South album ‘*Nairobi*’, and over 1 million copies of his solo album ‘*Nairobi*’ in 2005.²³ Gospel rapper Juliani in August 2011 launched his sophomore album ‘*Pulpit Kwa Streets*’ (Preaching in the streets) which earned him 1 million shillings at the Kisima Awards in October.²⁴ The album itself is a commercial success. These numbers are noteworthy and demonstrate a high level of popularity by hip-hop audiences as they respond to the artist’s *cred*. In the marketplace that is the city, this *street cred* attracts the attention of business corporations keen on capitalizing on it. Advertising and political campaign deals are some of the emergent ways in which Kenyan hip-hop artists are making money through their music by endorsing products which increase product sales and increases the artist’s visibility, thereby earning him a substantial living. There is a large number of artists who have become extremely wealthy through such business deals, creating what Neal (2012) and Christopher Holmes Smith (2012) call the ‘hip-hop mogul’, where the hip-hop artist does not just make money from his music, but more importantly, from his *cred* and *swag* (symbolic capital) in creating businesses, advertising products and in owning property.

While the typical hip-hop mogul with his overt expressions and attainment of wealth is not *as* visible in Kenya, the assertion that the African rapper is poverty-stricken and speaking from spatial margins is being challenged by these developments. If Ndarling P longed to ‘cross the poverty line’ from Mukuru slum to Buruburu in 1999, current hip-hop artists long to move away from Eastlands altogether into the affluent estates of the suburbs. However, this longing to ‘cross the border’ becomes challenging because it changes the aesthetic appeal of the artist and threatens to rob him of his hard-earned *street cred* and *swag*. The in-between space between ‘us and them’ itself becomes the site of internal conflict with an artist; a contrasting space that demonstrates the incompatibility between the ‘hood and the city (read: centre). For the artist, this incompatibility becomes more pointed especially since he has to maintain his position as a legitimate socio-political critic, but at the same time, benefit from the monetary gains to be had from the market. Jaguar epitomises this in his song *Kigeugeu* (Traitor) when he decries people turning their backs on him after he has worked extremely hard to ‘cross the border’. He aptly describes the in-between space between the artist and the city as ‘the border’, and it is apparent that he has a desire to (cris)cross this border using his music, but also, to maintain his *cred* and not have people turn their backs on him. Interestingly, one of the props Jaguar uses in the video for *Kigeugeu* is a mercedes convertible that he owns as he symbolically ‘outs’ himself, resigning himself to displaying wealth he insists he had earned. At the end of the day, the hip-hop artist considers himself a professional, or at least, considers what he does to be ‘work’ and therefore expects to earn a (substantial) income from it.

The subsequent tactics that artists employ to navigate these contradicting spaces is a discussion for another paper, including adopting both arrogant and apologetic narratives and identities. What is undisputable is that in both cases, a set of results occur in the larger narratives that continue to describe and define the city.

An artist can get critiqued for 'selling out' to corporate forces that compel him to make neutral and less-critical music. For instance, critics point out that Jua Cali has lost much of the critical tone of his earlier years, implying that his engagement with structures of the city have influenced his output and made it less critical and more jingoistic. The reason given for this subtle shift in Jua Cali's artistic expression and aesthetic is the artist's crossing of the 'border' into the 'othered' city space that is not only *not* the 'hood, but is opposed to the 'hood. The same has been argued in the United States where artists start out making hard-edged music that is highly critical of the city's hegemonic structures, only to get sucked into making seemingly misogynistic, *gangsta music* after signing deals with music corporations that are driven by capital market forces, specifically, audiences that demand and consume this *gangsta* rap (Ogbar, 2007). In this case, the artist could lose his *swag*, and *cred*.

Ironically, the inverse is also true – an artist can lose *cred* and *swag*, and therefore the right to *rep* when he is seen to be making little money, if any, from his artistic endeavors. In her research into Ukoo Flani's 11 years in the music industry, Divinity Barkley (2007: 18-19) recounts that her respondents in the field expressed disappointment with the hip-hop group because they had 'nothing to show' and had not achieved anything tangible in their long years in 'the hip-hop game'. Young artists, while admiring the critical tone of Ukoo Flani, were also put off by their lack of business savvy, demonstrated by their lack of marketing, branding, and music production, some citing that even a simple Ukoo Flani website or Facebook page were, for instance, missing. This is in stark contrast to artists like Juliani or Jua Cali by example, whose visibility on social networking sites have cemented their *cred* and offered them corporate financial opportunities.²⁵ Many Ukoo artists make albums once every few years, meaning that in the intervening period they are largely invisible in public life. Other hip-hop artists face the same criticism when they do not make any music (for sale), because ultimately, in the words of Kalamashaka's '*Tafsiri Hii*' (*ninalia nikitumia M.I.C- I speak using my microphone*), the rap M.I.C, through albums, is the only way an artist can *rep*. This paints a picture of a dynamic, if hostile cityscape, where an artist must continually engage his talent or risk losing it altogether. This is the picture of the modern, capitalistic and post-colonial city, where inhabitants must continually engage themselves, or risk being relegated to Alaholla's '*ocha*' – in the case of the hip-hop artist with no upcountry *ocha*, he is relegated to the 'hood (with its racist, colonial origins), where he is doomed to languish in perpetual poverty, his *cred* and *swag* lost, unable to *rep*.

Summary

As Siciliano notes, youth, as a peripheral group, continually challenges hegemonic representations of the centre. In Nairobi's case, the idea of the city as an ordered space that is representative of good governance and competent maintenance of law and order (what Wrong 2009: 193 refers to as a 'Platonic Ideal of Kenya...the only-if African state'²⁶) gets dismissed by hip-hop narratives that suggest the contrary. In various narratives, hip-hop succeeds in subverting economic, social and political *habitus* by adopting glocal stances that comment and criticize events on the local space. They further subvert the idea of a lack of agency in these glocal stances by bringing the global back to the local as though to challenge their constituents (those they represent) to do something to change things. These hip-hop artists, representative of their peers, therefore deconstruct the idea of a 'marginalized youth' by making themselves visible and audible in various city spaces, challenging political and social hegemonic narratives, both real and imagined, by creating their own. Even where they are forced to comply with the ideals of the city's normative order, say in terms of dressing when they sign various corporate contracts, they still manage to subvert these norms. These forms of subversions endear these artists to their fans, and become the aides through which they navigate different spaces of the city with some success.

However, this navigation is fraught with contradictions that continue to characterize the city spaces the hip-hop artist must simultaneously occupy. Martinez (2007) outlines the contradictory nature of hip-hop where on one hand; its subversive nature ensures issues of the periphery are articulated in the mainstream, while on the other, it can be exploitative, even misogynistic in content; consumer-driven and commoditized. These contradictions feed into the content that artists produce when navigating various city spaces, especially the in-between space that seems separates the 'hood from 'the other' moneyed city spaces that are gazed upon with both longing and fear. For instance, Kalamashaka's claim to a simple life is challenged when they have, and continue to get opportunities to travel abroad. Ironically, they can hardly claim to be rich when they live austere lives in the 'hoods of Korogocho and Dandora. This contradiction sets them at odds with their fans who wish to see them make something out of their music while at the same time admire them for their uncompromising political stand. The more important question becomes whether they dare to, say, move to live in more affluent suburbs, and risk losing their *street cred*, including the idea that they are among the 'founding fathers of Kenyan hip-hop'. In the same vein, we question a rapper's ability to *rep* in the light of his growing wealth and social mobility from the 'hood to the suburbs. We question whether this makes him lose his *street cred*, his *swag*, and ultimately, his ability to initiate significant socio-political interventions, though we see his fans responding to him positively on networking sites, meaning that he is succeeding at portraying the image of the successful 'kid from the 'hood' that others wish to emulate.

More importantly, these contradictions deconstruct poverty, marginalization and upward mobility for youth, represented by the hip-hop artist, who must find a way to maintain his *swag* and *street cred* or lose out on the symbolic capital they have taken long to cultivate. This *swag* and *cred* however have to be constantly re-negotiated and redefined, as they are never permanent, only being maintained by constant visibility in both the market and the artistic space. The hip-hop artist has to constantly stage shows and produce new music in order to maintain his symbolic capital (*cred and swag*) and to remain attractive to the city's business corporations. The microphone (m.i.c), symbolic of the rapping voice, has to be taken up as a profession if this is to be achieved, as the artist becomes the embodiment of '*repping*'.

More attractive is the global rise to fame of the young, Black, male artist. Traditionally a peripheralized societal group in America, the young, Black male is becoming more visible in wealth and fame, setting a benchmark of success for other global hip-hop stars. It seems that the hip-hop artist in Africa needs to be both successful as rappers, and as spokesmen of the marginal; ambassadors of the 'hood and initiators of the changes needed there. This can be a tall order for artists who may not have the subtle skills to navigate the various spaces of the cityscape, which are fluid and shifting, based on an audience that is demanding and exposed to a global narrative that might not necessarily match the realities of local city spaces. Coupled with the tension between earning a living within the city and representing the 'hood, hip-hop artists continue to define and re-define the city space, in sometimes conflicting, contradictory and fluid ways.

Notes

¹ This is more so because hip-hop is defined by the tag 'urban', together with other forms of urban popular culture.

² See Eisenberg, Andrew, conference paper 8th May 2010 at University of Birmingham AEGIS, and 27th January 2011 at St. John's College, Oxford.

³ See Omari, Shani conference and seminar papers 7th May 2010 at University of Birmingham AEGIS and ECAS 4 Conference June 4th 2011 at Uppsala, Sweden

⁴ Frank Furedi states that prior to 1950, Africans were expected to provide their own housing in designated native locations in a colonial colour bar that was not only socially motivated, but also legally reinforced by more than 100 city ordinances that were passed by the then colonial government.

⁵ NY Times reporter Jeffrey Gettleman observes a middle and upper class in Nairobi that he claims is almost completely detached from rural Kenya and enjoys a European lifestyle of private schools and clubs and material property. See *Kenya's Middle Class Feeling Sting of Violence*, in New York Times, February 11th 2008 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/11/world/africa/11kenya.html?pagewanted=all> Accessed 10th December 2011.

⁶ These opulent residential areas have been dubbed 'the leafy suburbs' because they are located in spacious areas with lush vegetation and trees, a phenomenon unheard of in Eastlands where every little space is occupied by tiny shanties or high-rise buildings aimed at cramming in as many residents as possible.

⁷ Sheng means 'Swahili-English'. It is a word used to denote street peer language spoken all over Kenya in one form or another. Chege Githiora defines it as 'a mixed language that emerged from the complex multilingual situation of Nairobi City', pointing out that '...its syntax is basically Swahili, but through ingenious code-switching, it draws from the phonology, morphology and lexicon of Kenyan languages spoken in the city such as, but not restricted to, Luo, Gikuyu, Ma(a)sai, Luhya, and coastal languages such as Giriama and Taita. English is also an important source of many loan words in Sheng' (2002: 159)

⁸ One particular informant I met during research, who has changed his life by joining a church and renouncing his life of crime, showed me several gunshot wounds on his body, saying that at the time of being shot, his one fear was that he was going to die and be 'buried and forgotten' at Lang'ata cemetery since the inner city was his home and his *ocha*.

⁹ See Sicialiano (2007: 211-220) on how the youth are framed as 'urban outcasts', and Wa Mungai (2007:52) on the marginalization of African youth to the fringes of societal power and status for a wider analysis of the representation of youth in hip-hop discourse.

¹⁰ See Mose, Caroline 18/02/2009, '*Nairobi's 'Glass House' experience and post-election IDPs*' found at <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/54186> Accessed 10 June 2010

¹¹ 'Swag' is also spelled thus in colloquial street usage. I use this spelling instead of the standard spelling 'swagger' for this chapter.

¹² The formation of a ‘hip-hop parliament’ consisted of hip-hop artists drawn from inner city neighbourhoods who would meet at the Ghetto Radio studio and hold round-table meetings, styling themselves as MPs, or members of parliament representing their respective neighbourhoods. These round-table meetings would be broadcast live, and listeners given opportunities to ‘question’ their respective MPs on various social and political issues. Hip-hop artists here styled themselves as ‘representatives of the people’, a duty that they have taken upon themselves to date. See Daniel Howden (18th February 2009) at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/kenyas-hip-hop-parliament-where-the-mcs-challenge-mps-1625529.html> Accessed 30th December 2011.

¹³ A *collabo* is a collaborative song project done by more than one artist or musical group. They are done both within and outside musical genres.

¹⁴ See Abraham Mariita “The Game in Concert: Nairobi Kenya” at <http://www.jamati.com/online/events/the-game-in-concert-nairobi-kenya/> Accessed 25th November 2011.

¹⁵ See The Saturday Star Newspaper, Andrea Bohnstedt 19 March 2011, ‘Kibera Slum is now the face of Kenya abroad’ found at <http://www.the-star.co.ke/business/andrea-bohnstedt/17935-kibera-slum-is-now-the-face-of-kenya-abroad-> Accessed 2nd January 2012.

¹⁶ See Kennedy Odede and his piece ‘*Slumdog Tourism*’ in the New York Times, August 9, 2010 which problematizes the glamorization of slum tourism as othering of already othered spaces.

¹⁷ Interviews with Rawbar, Kalamashaka artist and member of Ukoo Flani; other Ukoo Flani ‘baze’ members in group discussion who repeatedly asserted that Africa, with its griot traditions, is the original birthplace of hip-hop culture and music. See Githinji 2006:1 on the idea of ‘baze’.

¹⁸ Personal interview, Nairobi, April 2010.

¹⁹ The term is used currently among mostly young men, especially of middle-class backgrounds as a term of camaraderie (seen for instance in the greeting “hey, nigga, what’s up?”). Likewise, young women of middle-class backgrounds use it on members of the opposite sex to express anger and frustration (seen for instance in the warning “nigga, please!”). I have made heuristic conclusions that this language is more prevalent in middle-class Nairobi due to access to African-American popular shows such as ‘Boondocks’ and comedy shows by, among others, Chris Rock. The use of the word ‘nigga’ in hip-hop has come under intense debate by scholars. One end of the spectrum argues that its use and acronology is one of power that takes away the sting of its original racial meaning. KRS One in particular argues that its original French meaning equates to ‘King’. On the other hand, the ‘N-word’ is regarded as deeply offensive and self-reductionist when used by people of colour as it reinforces White, racist sentiments. Note that even when used in moments of ire, its meaning changes to that of reduction, than when used as a term of familiarity.

²⁰ Following the post-election violence, the government of Kenya enacted various laws and initiative to help with ‘national healing and reconciliation’, concluding that the violence had erupted from ethnic tensions. Therefore, songs like this one were banned for being incendiary and seemingly having the potential to ignite tensions among the youth.

²¹ See K’Naan, 2009, Album *Troubadour*, Track TIA, A&M/Octone Records.

²² See Blair, Elizabeth (2009) ‘Somali Rapper K’Naan Schools American MC’s’ found at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98957087> Accessed 15th January 2012

²³ See <http://www.museke.com/AbbasKubaff> (n.a), accessed 20th December 2011.

²⁴ See Odongo, David at <http://in2eastafrika.net/this-caps-everything-i-have-worked-for-says-juliani/> 3rd October 2011, Accessed 20th January 2012.

²⁵ Personal interviews, Nairobi, 2008, 2009, 2010.

²⁶ Wrong makes this argument in reference to the story of her book that is an account of a Kenyan government bureaucrat-turned-whistleblower, whose decision to expose massive corruption has him fleeing in exile to the United Kingdom. Wrong argues that part of the reason the Kenyan government is angry with the whistleblower is because his expose in a sense blows apart the guise of the ‘platonic ideal’ that a post-Moi regime had succeeded in building in the international community. This platonic ideal, long-known to local people is what the hip-hop artist continually challenges as Siciliano points out here.

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