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# Lyricism and other skizims.

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# Lyricism and other Skizims

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30 November 2010

**ABSTRACT**

Combining a short documentary film and research report' the project explores the Hip Hop scene in Johannesburg using three female Mcs as the main case study. Divided into three chapters the research distinguishes between two types of Hip Hop then grounds itself in the sphere of underground\conscious Hip Hop. The research report explains the sub-culture and the place of female Mcs in it as a male dominated arena and also addresses different theoretical concepts and their relevance within the culture.

## Plagiarism declaration

**I declare that this research report is my own work. It has not been submitted to any other university for degree examination before in any form.**

**MBALI LANGA**

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## INTRODUCTION

The most notable and recent documentary about the female presence in South African underground Hip Hop is *Counting Heads* produced early 2006 by a visiting student from Canada, Erin Offer alongside South African director Vusi Magubane, which looks at the rising number of female participation in South African underground Hip Hop. *Counting Heads* (2006) was nominated for several awards around the world. This documentary film sets out to find where the female Hip Hop practitioners are and focuses on the challenges of being female and being involved in the mostly male dominated industry. It is "a montage of polemical declarations of what it means to be a woman within Hip Hop culture" (Sosibo 2007:3).

The documentary looks at all four of the Hip Hop elements (rapping, break dancing, DJaying and graffiti writing) and showcases female participation, politics and practices in Hip Hop from a purely female trajectory. The film shows the growing number of females in underground Hip Hop and celebrates their existence within the sphere. *Counting Heads* exposes the presence of female participation within underground Hip Hop. Offer and Magubane establish that there is a presence of female practitioners within all the elements and they end with just asserting the presence of the practitioners.

My research documentary film picks up the baton from where *Counting Heads* (2006) ends. Instead of looking at all the elements- DJaying, graffiti, break dancing, rapping- as explored in *Counting Head* (2006), I investigate one element- rapping. Rapping is usually viewed as a male thing and the women who partake in it are usually seen as gimmicks or angry feminists who

speak against the gimmicks. Forman M. and Neal A. state that, “Although rap continues to be a predominately male, female MCs move beyond the shadows of male rappers in diverse ways” (2004:273). I seek to find out what it means to be a woman who raps in the South African underground scene. Are they accepted just because they are females or because they have a real talent? Through the analysis of lyricism- their words, Hip Hop politics and practices can also be reviewed because through their lyrics MCs focus on issues that face them daily.

Combining a short documentary film and research report, this research project seeks to explore the underground or conscious Hip Hop scene in Johannesburg using female MCs, mainly three black female MCs; *Q’ba*, *Arazen and Zephmetric* as the case study. The research is bound specifically within what I term the underground Hip Hop movement in South Africa, which is an organized anti commercial movement that has been brewing in and around Johannesburg for a number of years.

In Gauteng there are organized shows that happen every weekend in different townships, where unknown and known MCs, beat boxers, producers, Hip Hop DJ’s, break dancers, graffiti writers and Hip Hop appreciators gather to perform, dance, network and listen to conscious Hip Hop. This music is not played on national radio as it is either old (there is a preoccupation with old school American Hip Hop), or not viable for a commercial market as the content is either too socially or politically loaded or there is not enough of a demand for it. The artists are mostly independent and distribute their music from hand to hand. Many refuse to be confined to a record label that will encourage them to change their content for the benefit of profit. The research film

looks at how this conscious Hip Hop works, for these women and many like them, as a tool in the search and expression of self.

The research is divided into three chapters; the first chapter of the research report, looks at the general documentation of Hip Hop culture in South Africa and why I've decided to create *Lyricism and other Skizims*. The second chapter, Hip Hop and Theory, is a review of the literature that outlines and informs this project. The chapter looks at how the sub-culture has been indigenized and localized; it also looks at the ever contested issue of what entails authenticity by considering the notion of 'keeping it real'; and the relevance of space and place within this underground movement. The literature review also includes relevant and critical ideas from Hip Hop scholars that shape this research and are integral in the understanding of the underground Hip Hop culture.

The third chapter focuses on the film part of the research. It focuses on the treatment of the documentary film; the character biographies, the modes of representation used, and the conception of what lyricism is. The research also focuses on the analysis of the lyrics by the characters, both major and minor, as well as the comments made in the interviews featured in the documentary film. The section uses the lyrics to analyse and discuss ideas about gender relations, the importance of words, authenticity, language and relevance

This research is relevant as it offers an original insight into an under-documented and researched area within the South African context. Hip Hop music in South African scholarship has become a slow growing field. With the exclusion of the works of Adam Haupt not much has been written

about South African conscious Hip Hop, more specifically the female agency within the culture. This research then will significantly add to the disciplines of media studies and cultural studies. I am interested in showing how these women use rap music as a form of expression and tool in understanding their society and defining their presence and role as individuals (not gendered bodies) with own voices.

## LYRICISM AND OTHER SKIZIMS RESEARCH PROJECT

Through its life time this youth culture has been extensively documented. Surprisingly though, the documentation of female involvement in the culture in, the form of documentary films is not as popular as it is for their male counter-parts. The most that have been produced, as noted by Basu D. and Lemelle S, "cast men, [more specifically black men] as central figures in the culture and rapping as the most important element within the culture". (Basu and Lemelle 2006:56, e.a.) This is also true in the South African context where, in the number of Hip Hop documentaries produced, male domination within the culture is apparent. For example the most recent ones produced, *Definition of Freedo*m (2005) by Ras Kurt Benjy Orderson, *Hip Hop Revolution (2006)* by Weaam Williams, and *1852 Videomixtape (2010)* by Lizo Sonkwala look at how South African Hip Hop has evolved from a male perspective.

*1852 Videomixtape (2010)* for instance, looks at the Hip Hop movement in Meadowlands Soweto. The film randomly drops in on 'Heads' or 'Cats' (terms used to label a Hip Hop lover or participant) in that 'hood' (term used in place of township or ghetto) as they go about their day.

The 90 minute documentary focuses on the male perspective as the only female who appears is Q'ba and she does so for only 2 minutes during a performance. She is not given an interview or an opportunity to say anything to the camera like most of her male peers. The film is unbalanced as it suggests that Meadowlands only has one female rapper/emcee (MC, here after which is another term for a rap artist, it is more commonly used in the Hip Hop circles than the term rapper) which is not true.

In defense of the film makers this maybe because the presence of females within Hip Hop, is not so apparent generally and within South African Hip Hop particularly. For example the ratio of men and women at a Hip Hop show is always evidently unequal, DJ Sistamatic emphasizes this point in '*Counting Heads'* (2006), a documentary film about female participation in underground Hip Hop, where she states that she is tired of always "counting female heads" whenever she goes to DJ at a session, and the number always ends below 20. She expresses a desire to see the number multiply and states a plan to facilitate DJ workshops for high school girls in an attempt to cultivate interest and participation. This was in early 2006 when Sistamatic expressed this view, four years later the situation is pretty much the same if not worse, as many female participants seem to have lost interest in the Hip Hop culture. DJ Sistamatic and D'unique (both DJs featured in the documentary *'Counting Heads'*) are at present, no longer DJs and one of the female MCs in the documentary found herself at a crossroad with Hip Hop when the documentary was completed.

Within the sub-culture of Hip Hop it is mostly ‘a man’s world’, like it is in society in general, and women find it hard to define their own role in Hip Hop. They are faced with the challenge of carving an individual style and asserting their existence while fighting against being shadowed by the males’ narcissistic and dominating presence. Toop (1991: 95) states that “since rapping has strong roots in predominately male activities of toasts (a Jamaican practice of speaking over dub beats while DJaying, it was introduced in Bronx by Kul Herc a DJ originating from Jamaica) and dozens (a playful boasting on beats), it is not surprising that men see it as the musical equivalent of a sport like baseball. They’re prepared to accept that women can do it but see the competitive element as the final deterrent. Woman associated with the scene feel that men tend to disapprove of their standing in front of a crowd bragging and boasting”.

McRobbie and Garber assert that “Female invisibility in youth sub-cultures then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, a vicious cycle” (cited in Huq 2006:12). A cycle affirming their conception of sub-cultures being a dominantly male sphere. They further argue that even though women within sub-cultures rebel against customary or mainstream femininity the expected gender divisions are still at play within the sub-culture they associate with. In other words, the women’s attempt at defying delineated gender expectations by joining certain sub-cultures is ironically met with similar organizational structures within their rebellion ground. Ultimately women under these sub-cultures end up suffering a double marginalization.

Double marginalization implies that in one way they turn against conventional gender expectations of patriarchal society but in another way they still remain in subordination as the

sub-cultures they escape to are governed by the very same patriarchal systems that govern the society that these sub-cultures exist in. Forman M. and Neal A. point out that "as sexism and misogyny are largely extensions of normative patriarchal privilege, their reproduction in the music of male Hip Hop artists speaks more powerfully to the extent that these young men are invested in that privilege than it does to any evidence that they are solely responsible for its reproduction" (2004:247). Our society's patriarchal ideology filters into all spheres of human productions as we produce from an ideological standing that we've been conditioned by, and Hip Hop being a human production is also not exempt from this.

Basu D. and Lemelle S. argue that "Rap music is preeminent example of an art form that exhibits dual tendencies with respect to Western modernity. On one hand, rap music celebrates individualism, racial chauvinism, consumerism, capitalism, and a sexual dominance- core values that have shaped the trajectory of modernity and its bitter fruits, particularly for people of color…and on the other hand, rap music has also provided a powerful critique of Western modernity" (2006:210). In light of this statement we see how globalization, mass media and capitalism have influenced the development process of Hip Hop in a great manner. Starting out as a form of social expressionism the genre gained much popularity within American youth that corporate spheres saw an exploitable and profitable market, taking the youth movement from street level to commercial sensation.

Common Sense, an acclaimed Hip Hop artist, describes this journey from cultural expression to media exploit, in his song *'I used to love H.E.R'* (1992). In the song he personifies Hip Hop as a girl he met when he was ten years old and describes his relationship with her as she goes through various changes and ages. He starts with how she was when they met and expresses the qualities that drew him close to 'her'; *"what I loved bout her; she was old school…not about the money; her style was mic check an all;… I respected her; she hit me in the heart…she was fresh yo, when she was underground, original, pure and untapped no doubt sister; I tell you I miss H.E.R;*

In the second verse he discusses her evolution to a tool used for cultural and social expressionism, '*Now periodically I would see 'her' in the clubs or house parties; she didn't have a body but she started getting thick quick; did a couple of videos and became Afrocentric; out goes the weave, in goes the braids, beads, medallions; she was on that tip about stopping the violence; about my people she was teaching me; not preaching to me she was speaking to me; in a method so leisurely so easily.* After this he raps about the small changes that slowly moved 'her' from 'her' core, *…but then she broke to the west coast…got her big papa, but was foul she said that pro black was goin outta style, she said Afrocentricity was passed…now black music is black music and it's all good; I wasn't sulking coz she was hanging with the boys in the hood.'*

In the third verse Common outlines 'her' move into mainstream media '*I might have initially thought this chick was creative, but once The Man got to her, he took her off like a native, told her if she had an image and a gimmick that she could make money and she did it like a dummy; now I see her in commercials, she's universal; she used to only swing it with the inner city*

*circles; now she be in the burbs looking rocka dressing hip and on some dumb ish when she comes to the city; talkin bout popin blocks serving rocks and hitting switches; now she's a gangsta rollin' with gangsta bitches; always smoking blunts, getting drunk and telling me sad stories; now she only fucks with the funk; stressing bout how hardcore and real she is; she was really the realest before she got into showbiz.'*

The second half of the last verse speaks about 'her' at present and how he (Common) as an underground/conscious Hip Hop artist has a desire to take 'her' back to the time she was concerned about being socially relevant. *'I did 'her' not to say I did 'her', not just to say I did 'her' I'm committed; but so many niggas' hit that it's just not the same letting all these doofers do 'her' I've seen niggas' slam 'her' and take 'her' to the sewer; but I'm o' take her back home and let this shit stop coz who I'm talkin bout y'all is HIP HOP*. In this song Common touches on a few issues that are linked with Hip Hop; the streets, keeping it real and underground/commercial rap split. The dual tendency of Hip Hop, as mentioned by Basu D. Lemelle S, is explained in the song mentioned above. It shows how and when the split in Hip Hop occurred when *"the Man got to her"*. It is this duality that has caused a rift in the culture leading to two opposing polarities, the conscious/underground and commercial/ gangster Hip Hop.

The genre term 'gangsta rap' (or gangster rap) was coined in 1989, "when 'Gangsta Gangsta' by NWA featured in Billboards' newly launched Hot Rap singles chart. Its first appearance was in *Los Angeles Times* when Ice Cube, playing on the song's title, used the term 'gangsta rap' in an

interview. By 1990's the genre tag was in wide use, and it has pervaded rap discourse ever since." (Quinn 2005:10). Commercial/ gangster rap is villainous for its sexist nature and misogynistic content. By Haupt's (2008) definition it is *gangster*, because it reflects the violent lifestyles of some inner-city youth (crime, guns, drugs and gangs). This category of Hip Hop was appealing to a broad audience across the globe, arguably because its themes (economic isolation, crime etc.) were common for every ghetto in every city of the world and they therefore appealed to the ones who could relate with those rap-stories. The few females within gangster rap mostly play in and profit from the role of being essentialized to a sexual supplement for men. Lil Kim, one of America's popular female artists is a very good example of this as she glorifies her status as the Queen B [B shortened for bitch] while she gyrates minimally dressed in her videos testifying how she "can make men come and no other bitch can work it like she can" *How many licks* (2001).

In South Africa, a crew called *985* emerged a couple of years ago with a commercial hit named 'Utlhwa beat' [hear the beat] the crew had one SiSwati female MC who adopted the dress sense of pioneers like Lil Kim and Foxy Brown. In the song she spits (Hip Hop term for reciting) out lyrics saturated with sexual innuendos as she bashes other women and claims that she is the best in bed as "no chick can get so wet, I got more water than a tap…" In this song the female MC plays out the subservient role laid out for women by gangster-rap. The conscious/underground Hip Hop overtly opposes this tradition as the female body is treated with much more respect, Haupt defines it as 'Conscious', because the artists are describing life in the ghettos, the social discontent, the economic isolation, racism, gender inequality, police brutality and so on. The

artists he speaks about use Hip Hop as means for “cultural expressions that are not co-opted by corporate marketing agendas” (Haupt 2008:144). It affords the artists an opportunity and platform to voice out the social ills of their society but the people in the forefront of this movement are still mostly men

The dual tendency of Hip Hop, as mentioned by Basu D. Lemelle S is also evident in South African Hip Hop, where commercial Hip Hop imitates American gangster rap. It promotes the capitalistic mentality through its content that glorifies materialism. “This ‘watered-down’ form of rap music focuses heavily on the beat, hooks and choruses, and much less on the verses. It has little to do with education and much more with (vulgar) entertainment, the main themes being centered on, the accumulation of wealth, male sexual conquests, drug abuse and misogyny” (Haupt 2008:147).

Opposing this view is Quinn who views gangster rap in a more positive light. Quinn (2005:12) sees gangster rap as having a political significance which he breaks down into two spheres. First he notes that ‘gangster’s epic industrial journey activated a “politics of redistribution”- crudely more black profits and black faces behind the scenes. Second, it mobilized a “politics of recognition raising provocative questions about cultural identity and political orientation through its textual practices”. Commercial Hip Hop, the progression of Hip Hop in America, its transposition to South Africa and the history of its existence in South Africa are not the focus of this research. Adam Haupt and others have written extensively about those specific points amongst others. The research report’s focus is on the already established South African

underground scene where female MCs have created a voice and space for themselves in the predominately male sphere.

Counteracting the commercial scene, South African Hip Hop has a very strong underground movement where the raps produced offer a consequential avenue for expression and critical engagement with particular subjects that may be counter-hegemonic. There is a movement that has developed in and around Johannesburg where different townships/ ghettos host Hip Hop sessions. This started a few years back with sessions like *Black Sunday*, in Soweto, this particular session has since been discontinued but many have sprouted in multitudes in its place.

Dark Spark, an MC from Soweto, presents himself as an artist from the underground inviting one to listen to his words. In one track he professes that major moves are being made in the underground and if you think underground artists are not worth consideration then you are wrong because *"Big things agwaan underground"* (agwaan is a Spatwa term for 'going on'; Spatwa is Jamaican slang). Robo the technician- a South African Hip Hop elder as he refers to himself- acknowledges this existence of an underground in South African Hip Hop where he raps and says *"Underground is esoteric; it's the nucleus of this culture"* in his view the underground movement is the basis and nub of Hip Hop. Within the Johannesburg context there is a movement within the Hip Hop culture that goes against the commercializing of Hip Hop, and it is interested in effecting social change.

The MCs in the underground are more often than not preoccupied with talking about resisting the commercialization of rap music. The underground MCs acknowledge that one of their main aims is to bring an end to it. Dark Spark explicitly expresses this in his track '*Stick up*' (2010) "*This underground and commercial has turned into a war; murder rhyme blood bath I adore; the commercial get the gun clap gunshots galore.*" In the song he acknowledges that the disagreements on both sides have become so intense it's like a war of words. Another preoccupation of underground adherents is the notion of 'keeping it real' by concerning themselves with 'consciousness', lyrical dexterity and taking Hip Hop back to its core, as opposed to the superficiality and pretence of commercial rap. A sentiment expressed by Common "*stressing bout how hardcore and real she is; she was really the realest before she got into showbiz."*

Entrepreneurship is also rampant as many MCs sell and distribute their own material usually hand to hand or in other innovative ways. They are faced with many challenges when it comes to distribution as most underground/ conscious MCs are not signed to any recording labels. EJ Von Lyrik one of the members from Godessa- a Hip Hop female trio from Cape Town- expresses this preference of independence in their track *'Armour get on'* (2004) when she says "*I keep it real signing only independent deals, I own my own rhymes you only own your skill''*. The rebellion against established recording companies is for the integrity of their music, as EJ Von Lyrik expresses. By signing into such labels you trade in your content for fame. Robo the technician also expresses this view where he says *"Fuck your deal kid you wily nily; all you cheesy rappers better chill; lyrically you fail so you can sell"* These views mirror what Common says in the last verse of his song '*I used to love H.E.R'* quoted earlier.

## HIP HOP AND THEORY

A number of studies on Hip Hop read it as a genre of music but also as a form of contestation to mainstream media in the form of underground Hip Hop. This is contesting hegemonic ideas about gender, politics, capitalism and many other issues. Underground Hip Hop artists use their words as their weapons and rap as the tap to outpour their cries against dominant ideology. Haupt's (2008) work makes specific reference to conscious Hip Hop's ability of being a medium of contestation to mainstream media and hegemonic understandings of culture and economics at a global level, he also talks about how some South African conscious Hip Hop acts like Godessa; BVK and Prophets of the city- have played an important role in deconstructing dominant ideas about social ills, race, gender and identity.

According to Keyes "Hip Hop is a youth arts mass movement that evolved in the Bronx New York during the early 1970's" (2002:1). The culture has since seen a remarkable development as presently Hip Hops reach has far surpassed its birthplace and enjoys a global status as a popular youth culture. "At the core of the culture are four elements "comprised of disk jockeys (DJs/turntablist), emcees (MCs), break-dancers (b-boys and b-girls), and graffiti writers (aerosol artists)… Hip Hop further encompasses what its adherents describe as an attitude rendered in the form of stylized dress, language, and gestures associated with urban street culture" (Keyes 2002:1). "Knowledge of self is considered to be the fifth element of Hip Hop which informs the other elements" (Haupt 2008:144).

Hip Hop has moved from being located in the ghettos of America to being a global culture that is being mass consumed by an assortment of diverse consumers in a localized way. Every country that has adopted this culture does so in a unique and indigenized manner. Zine Magubane (cited in Basu and Lemelle 2006:210) writes that, the rap music that has become a major part of what is exported and consumed globally as American music culture is a complicated mix of both of the aforementioned tendencies [having dual tendencies of being a tool for misogyny and sexism as well as critique itself (through conscious Hip Hop) by promoting sexual egalitarianism and concentrating on social issues], as a result, "when it is 'indigenized' both elements become available for interpretation and incorporation." South African rap artists have seized upon both traditions shaping the values that inhere in American popular aesthetics to reflect local political, economic, and gender struggles.

Throughout the years musical practices have always played a key role in shaping identities, attitudes and to an extent ideology. Guilbault notes that "Musical genres have often played a crucial role in the expression and negotiation of identity" (cited in Wade 2000:23). Hip Hop music has done the same; the MCs interviewed in the documentary express how Hip Hop informs a large part of their social and private identity. -Social identity being the persona they play in the Hip Hop society and private identity being the personality that Hip Hop has shaped influencing the women's daily lifestyle.

In terms of social identity Hip Hop has provided them with a feeling of belonging to a type of 'imagined community'. This in turn breeds a sense of being in solidarity with like minded

individuals. “Like social movements in general Hip Hop enables its participants to imagine themselves as part of a larger community; thus it produces a sense of collective identity and agency” (Watkins 1998:introduction). ‘Imagined community’ as a term is borrowed from Benedict Anderson. Anderson borrows from works of nationalism and defines nation as an ‘imagined political community’ (Anderson 1991:6).

Negotiation of the black identity is one thing that Hip Hop has prioritized since its inception. Huq (2006:110) states that rap can be seen as rebel music and Rose (1994:2) defines rap as “a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices”. In *Representing; Hip Hop Culture and the production of Black Cinema,* Watkins. S.C (1998:4) argues that the emergence of Hip Hop culture illustrates black youth agency. He states that the “Black youth struggle to combat their social, economic, and political subordination but unlike previous generations of black youth, the vast communications media landscape has become a site for conducting their collective struggle.”

The Hip Hop community affords the participants in the culture, a platform to unite as an ‘imagined community’ and revolt against social ills as a unified mass of like minded individuals. Sub-cultures have the power of creating a sense of communal acceptance in the imaginary of the participants. The Hip Hop culture is no different. Participants in underground Hip Hop find acceptance and feel a sense of being in cohesion with a society unified by their love of Hip Hop. Within this ‘imagined community’ they find recognition and common ground with people who share their views which mostly contest dominate society’s ideologies. This brings to mind a song

‘*Peace to da Fam’* (2009) by Optic a young MC from Grahamstown. The song gives thanks to all in his Hip Hop family (fam for short) who have been instrumental in his success as an MC. It is not uncommon to hear ‘heads’ addressing each other as fam, brother, sister, etc. this illustrates that their belief in this cohesion is so innate that they feel that they are unified like a real family.

When one goes to any of these underground sessions [the underground shows mentioned earlier in the paper, Dungeon hack, Splash Jam etc] it is a norm to see the people there dressed in similar clothing that American Hip Hop artists are seen wearing in videos. I remember when Masta Ace, a much respected underground Hip Hop artist from New York, visited South Africa earlier in 2009 he noted the copy cat tactics of South African heads. In a press conference held by Ritual concept store, he made a quirky comment on how everyone looks like they just stepped out of the streets of New York and how he felt out of place as he wore African print attire. JJ Reilly proclaims that “Since its inception Hip Hop has served as a powerful voice and form of expression for young black audiences and has evolved into a culture with its own language, style of dress and mindset” (http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Hip-Hop-Culture-Identity accessed 31 July 2009). Dark Spark resonates this in his track *‘What’s happening’* (2010) where he says “*Hip Hop is a part of my life; I don’t fake it”*.

Hot Box, an MC from Cape Town, shares his story of transformation from thug to MC, *“Before it was just bout the cars and gangsters; now it’s about ill verses and 16 bars; It was hard before, until I found Hip Hop to erase all the scars; Lost in a world of rhythm and rhyme flow I’m cruising it, using it to portray my everyday life and strife… like the weed that I smoke it’s a*

*need" 'High quality'* (2004). Robo the technician on his track '*Game won't be the same*' (2009) says "*My fundamental is rap*". He implies that his essential belief or primary concern and activity is Hip Hop. A line from the Godessa track '*Mike Lesson*' (2004) says "*Without my mic I'm like a stand on its own"*. This line suggests that the MC would be destitute without Hip Hop like a microphone stand missing its microphone. Zephmetric states that she lives and breathes Hip Hop, so she can never say what Hip Hop means to her because it is something that is in her and cannot be discussed as a factor outside of her.

When looking at the origin of Hip Hop in South Africa one cannot disregard South Africa's political history. Revolting against the practices of racial segregation of the Apartheid regime in the late 1980's, Hip Hop began as an outcry for an oppressed people. Adam Haupt's work argues that early South African Hip Hop crews such as 'Prophets of da City' (POC), 'Black Noise' and 'Brasse vannie Kaap' (BVK) were inspired by American Hip Hop to "construct" their own "black nationalist narratives that rely on the notion of a global black experience of oppression and resistance" ( Haupt 2008:145-146).

"Politically motivated Hip Hop was pioneered in the Western Cape by the groups Prophets of the City (POC), Black Noise, and later Brasse Vannie Kaap (BVK, or Brothers of the Cape). To this day BVK crew members (a crew is a group or collective of Hip Hop adherents) continue to promote the ideals of socio-economic and racial parity through community development programs."(*The origin of hip-hop in South Africa*-www.hiphoparchive.org *accessed 31 September 2009*). This issue touched on above becomes evocative of the way that Hip Hop

materialized in the Bronx, and is also relevant to other countries where people who are in a period of oppression start searching for self definition (through various practices and activities including music, which is of major concern in this paper) which leads to them producing a new form of identity. These groups used tactics similar to those of Public Enemy to overtly challenge the Apartheid regime and speak out against social ills facing their communities. Public enemy overtly challenged American ideology from the ideological positioning of black consciousness.

Swartz (2003) writes that the most popular youth movement in South Africa presently is Kwaito, a form of music that often avoids dealing with serious issues while Hip Hop concerns itself with social issues. Many people have tried likening Kwaito to Hip Hop claiming that Kwaito could even be considered as South Africa's version of indigenized Hip Hop. Zine Magubane views Kwaito as "an indigenous form of rap that emerged from the most economically depressed areas of South Africa" (Cited in Basu. Lemelle 2006:213). Swartz disagrees and concludes that Kwaito is not South African rap but rather a local form of music that had evolved to meet the needs of the youth living in South Africa. It is important to acknowledge this relationship and show how they relate to each other. The study of Kwaito will not be touched on further in this research but an issue on vernacular rap and the politics of it being closer to Kwaito (because of language) than Hip Hop will be looked at as an issue that arose from the research process.

In *Decolonizing the Mind: The politics of Language in African Literature*, Wa Thiong'o makes an interesting argument about language, colonization and the colonized mind. He says that by successfully infiltrating the mind the colonizers have dominated countries more effectively than

political and military occupation. He argues that colonialism's **"**most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world**"** (Wa Thiong'o 1986:16). South African Hip Hop culture has been accused of imitating American Hip Hop culture in numerous ways that at the end it is almost a replica, which then takes away from its fascination with authenticity. One major 'culprit' of copy cat tactics is the language used. In the production of South African raps, English is mostly used as language of delivery along with a suspiciously American imitation accent. Participants dispel this accusation and maintain that even if their preferred choice of expression is English it is still with an authentically South African flavour.

*KEEPING IT REAL*

The notion of realness is a concept that finds much preoccupation within Hip Hop circles. "In Hip Hop culture authenticity is of key importance with 'keeping it real' being the phrase to connote this" (Basu and Lemelle 2006:26). 'What's real' has also emerged through the years as a uniquely resonant concept within Hip Hop culture…in most cases it stands as an ill-defined expression referring to combined aspects of racial essentialism, spatial location, and a basic adherence to the principles and practices of the Hip Hop culture. It emerged with the most clarity following rap's transitional phase from an underground or alternative musical form to a multi-platinum-selling facet of the popular music industry" (Forman 2002: xviii). The same is true for South African Hip Hop where the underground is always attacking the commercial sector because of its failure to keep to 'the real'.

Forman (2002: xviii) further states that "authenticity has always been a desirable quality in both youth culture and popular music…it is a central concept in the discourses surrounding popular music". Some of the defining features that he spells out are being original, creative, sincere, and unique, musicianship, live performance and independent label operations. Hot Box expresses this view in *'High quality'* (2004) where he says, *"whatever you say make sure you display originality, you can't repeat what's already been said but you can make sure that you stay high quality"*. He urges MCs to strive for creativeness and inventiveness in their raps.

Keyes states that "while rap continues to cross over into a wider acceptance, many rap artists strive to remain 'underground' refusing to identify with a pop market and insisting that staying real necessitates rawness, authenticity and a continued connection with the streets" (Keyes 2002:122). On her EP (A five track CD released before the album) Nthabi- a well known MC from Johannesburg who has been dominating the female MC front for a number of years now, has a song "What's real" (2008) where she addresses this 'community' policing of other peoples music. She starts the song saying "*you know what this song is about; it's about those people who wanna tell you what's real, how can you tell me if my song is real if you aren't even in it? I say whatever man, what's real to me may not be real to you, so just do you, I'm sick of these cats*.'

In this song Nthabi addresses this issue of authenticity and who decides what is, as she is fed up with the ongoing war of words, she concludes in the song that whether you spit punch lines and speak consciousness or you throw random lines on bubble gum beats, your realness is yours and those who don't relate should leave you alone. A view not easily agreed upon by the Hip Hop

masses. This insistence on ‘keeping it real’ will always remain as an arguable debate, but who has the right to affirm what real really is or is not? In the case of Nthabi, she is one of the few underground MCs that have been able to permeate commercial markets without a compromise of self, in terms of rap style and content. Her music is still very much appealing to the underground but is also not alienating to commercial markets.

*SPACE N PLACE*

In the definition of significance, meaning, and practice within Hip Hop, space is a concept which plays a major role. Forman M. argues that “Hip Hop comprises a deliberate, concentrated, and often spontaneous array of spatial practices and spatial discourses that are both constituted by and constitutive of the spaces and places in which its primary cultural producers live and work” (Forman 2002:xviii). Space and place materialize notably as organizing concepts demarcating a vast range of imaginary or definite social practices that are embodied in narrative or lyrical form and that display identifiable local, regional, and national aesthetic inflections. In the underground events one is sure to hear a particular area code or ‘hood’ being praised.

Mitchell (2001:33) concurs that, “raps lyrical constructions commonly display a pronounced emphasis on place and locality, contemporary rap is even more specific, with explicit references to particular streets, boulevards and neighborhoods, telephone area codes, postal service zip codes, or other socio-spatial information. Rap artists draw inspiration from their regional affiliations as well as from a keen sense of what I call the extreme local, upon which they base their construction of spatial imagery”. For example in one of the shows I regularly DJ at,

Dungeon Shack, which occurs every third Sunday of the month in Meadowlands, Soweto, it is the norm to hear 1852(Meadowlands postal service zip code) being versed as a chant by MCs and audiences. Other crews from other areas also come to these shows and the MCs representing that area will always exult their 'hood' before rapping and representing the 'realness' of their area. For example Deep Soweto (a collective of crews who come from the further parts of Soweto) will acknowledge their particular area as well as the collective, they even have a visual hand symbol with middle finger pointing down (same one, one would use to get a taxi that goes to the area) that they lift up to the crowd.

Mitchell states that "the reclaiming of local spaces and localities as sites for the construction of imaginary local identities through musical and sub-cultural practices such as rap and Hip Hop is also an important aspect of what Stokes describes as an 'insistence on locality and authenticity" (Mitchell 2001:33). This shows that the 'streets' in the underground movement are important; they are seen as a significant affirmation of an individual keeping to 'the real'. By actively acknowledging locality conscious Hip Hop then promotes a pride of coming from the hood. To the participants it means one is not forgetting the struggles faced by ghetto dwellers but elevating the streets that have shaped their being and instilling pride in those who still live there.

Q'ba in her *Gutter Butter* mix tape features a track that glorifies the streets as where the 'real people' with 'real issues' living in a bleak South African social reality come from and Nthabi in her song titled 'Hip Hop' raps about the culture being one that has emerged from the streets and how she identifies with that life. Forman further states "how a highly detailed and consciously

defined spatial awareness is one of the key factors distinguishing rap music and Hip Hop from the many other cultural and sub-cultural youth formations currently vying for popular attention" (Forman 2002: xviii).

## LYRICISM AND OTHER SKIZMS DOCUMENTARY FILM

Every documentary film is constructed using specific modes of representation, "Modes of representation are basic ways of organizing texts in relation to certain recurrent features or conventions" (Nichols 1991:34). They are organizational models that assist the filmmaker in structuring their documentary film. Bill Nichols categorizes four modes of representation, namely; the Expository mode, Observational mode, Interactive mode and the Reflexive mode; and a new mode the Performative, this research only uses the Expository mode, Interactive mode and Performative mode of representation.

The Expository mode; often referred to as voice of god, directly addressed its subject through didactic narration. The text "addresses the viewer directly with titles or voices that advance an argument about the historical world" (Nichols 1991:34). The historical world is the world we exist in. It becomes historical once it is captured on film. The **e**xpository mode uses techniques such presenting and sustaining the argument through images, having no dramatic suspense instead presenting a seemingly 'objective' understanding of the topic where in actual fact it is highly subjective and it re-instates a socially correct understanding of that particular world.

The Interactive mode engages with documentary subjects more directly through interviews and interventional tactics. The filmmaker's presence is very distinct and it attempts to acknowledge the filmmaker's intervention in the construction of the film. In this particular documentary this was achieved by mixing hand-held camera shots with stagnant medium close up shots as well as inserting my actual voice when asking the opening question. The Interactive mode also evolves around the interview and uses more than often a masked interview. Masked interviews are achieved in the way a documentary is edited, the active asking of questions is omitted from the film but the characters still answer to the interviewers questions without the knowledge of the viewer.

The Performative mode accepts creative treatment of reality as a part of documentary truth and allows the art of performance to be integrated within the documentary realm as well as bring to light the constructed nature of documentary. This documentary film *Lyricism and other Skizims* mixes the three above modes. Firstly *Lyricism and other Skizims* is interview centered and uses a masked interview as the interactive mode entails. The characters all answer directly to the camera, answering the same questions but framed as if they are finishing each other's thoughts or adding to what the other was saying. *Lyricism and other Skizims* has no dramatic suspense; it flows in a conversing manner and presents the characters views in a seemingly objective manner where in actual fact it presents their subjective views of the culture, as participants within Hip Hop culture.

One of the minor characters brings light to this fact towards the end of the documentary film by saying that *'we understand sub-cultures differently by where we are viewing it from, it's all*

*relative to your experiences'*. The presence of the filmmaker is also acknowledged by the animation of me asking the first question of the documentary film. *'You call yourself a lyricist right; please tell us why lyrics are important to you?* I chose to insert myself in the film because Hip Hop is a culture that I have fully immersed myself in. As a graffiti writer and DJ I have been involved with this culture for many years. This makes me a participant performer and an insider in the research, who speaks with the other participants and not for them.

The documentary film is driven by three female MCs who have been involved or have been surrounded by Hip Hop since a young age. They are all MCs who are involved in conscious Hip Hop. Though they do the same thing and concern themselves with similar matters their concepts, styles, and delivery are different. They also come from different townships in and around Johannesburg which shows that conscious Hip Hop is not only centered on Soweto. There are other characters both male and female that feature as minor characters in the documentary but the main voice is from the trajectory of these three female MCs.

Forman describes the MC as one who constructs elaborate rhymes that interact with the digitally produced electronic rhythms, telling stories that vividly depict contemporary life and are laden with references to popular- culture icons, people, situations, and sites. The rap narrative is, in effect, a highly mobile form that ranges widely across our cultural spaces, touching on many walks of life in multiple ways (Forman and Neal 2004:16). Delivery for an MC is important within this sub-culture, the way you package your message is fundamental to audience reception. "Proverbs, turns of phrases, jokes, almost any manner of discourse is used, not for purposes of

discursive communication but as weapons in verbal battle (Toop 1991:32). To gain street cred(credit) you need to have more than just something to say, it is how you say it. Lyrical skill is esteemed by those within the culture. And lyrical skill is determined by a number of factors such as fluency, flow, use of metaphors, word choice and punch line construction, which are all essential and salient factors that determine your dopeness as a lyricist.

While rap music is undoubtedly urban and a medium by which segments of a disenfranchised urban youth speak, its artists prefer to reclaim the word "ghetto" as a marker of power an identity, thus referring to rap music as "ghetto music" or music from the "underground" (Keyes 2002:122). The ghetto and the' streets' are an important space for Hip Hop, especially conscious Hip Hop. The documentary starts with Qba's live performance of '*Kasi shit'* where she praises the streets she's from and also shares the issues that define almost every ghetto, Kasi or township.

The reason the documentary film starts with this particular clip is to locate the subject being reviewed in the documentary within a certain theoretical framework that the research is exploring. The framework being; Hip Hop, space, place, politics and practices; Q'ba is a female MC, performing in front of a crowd full of men at a park in the ghetto. That explains that the main voice of the documentary is from a female centered trajectory the song also praises her as being the same old person from the hood, unchanged by time and relocation nor education as the ghetto is her home.

The film *Lyricism and other Skizims* uses different creative aesthetics in its visual realization. The general look is very saturated and isolates certain colors in the frame while the rest of it remains black and white or slight shade of sepia. *Lyricism and other Skizims* opens up with an amateur visual sequence of Q'ba in a live underground performance and the same footage is used in the concluding sequence to act as a framing device. When the female MCs perform or recite the frame is in full color. This is to illustrate how music makes the female MCs come alive. Generally they are down to earth- presented by the subdued colors then like the burst of color in the performances they are lively microphone handlers.

The general look references from of old school underground Hip Hop videos, - *'Natural'* by Arrested development; '*Bonita applebum'* by Tribe called quest; '*Pigeon*' by Canibal Ox; and '*Slaughter House'* by Masta Ace these videos are a grainy black and white, sepia or subdued in color. I try to emulate these features in *Lyricism and other Skizims*. I also use graffiti-like-fonts to bring in the association with graffiti which is a central aesthetic element of Hip Hop culture.

*CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES*

**Q'BA**

Known as Super mom, is a twenty something mother of two, who lives and breathes Hip Hop. She is inspired by the likes of Geane Grey and that influence is very evident in her dress code and militant flow. She has been doing hip hop 'Ever since I remember' Quba. Originally from Swazi land this shy but most definitely not soft spoken lady has made a name for herself in the South African underground. She has featured alongside many artists in the hip hop industry and

has also included in a documentary about female hip hop artists in South Africa, *Counting Heads*. The documentary has already been nominated for several awards around the world and was showcased on Women's Day (9 August 2006) by the Imbokodo collective. A few of her tracks have been featured in the Hype Sessions compilations; CDs that accompany the only Hip Hop magazine in the country. In 2008 she released her mixtape mixed by Dj Zakes 'Gutter Butter" where she features Snazz the Dictator- former member of Cashless Society and also features a song where she is in collaboration with Born Afrikan a rising reggae star originally from Malawi.

**ARAZEN**

Currently a University of the Witwatersrand student, studying Philosophy and Media Studies, she was introduced to Hip Hop through her brother when she was 11. She found it more fascinating than poetry which was what most of her peers where involved in. Hip Hop inspired her to read and write more and flow on a beat. When she was 15 she started performing in shows in and around Thembisa. She has moved a long way ever since then and has featured in a couple of mix tapes and collaborations. Her style is a blend of rap, poetry; toasting, singing and most recently beat boxing. She prefers free-styling then 'dropping a script' (reciting a written verse) as she says it challenges her to keep on her toes and not rely on 'rehearsed words'.

**ZEPHMETRIC**

Originally from Boksburg, she was introduced to Hip Hop at age 13 when her family moved to Vosloorus. She hung around with a bunch of young male aspiring MCs who encouraged her to start rapping. At 14years she wrote and performed her first script at a small session hosted at the local basketball court. She continued performing every month at these sessions until she met DL

who convinced her to join his three man crew and become the first lady of Alphatoids when she was 16. She has stayed with the crew since then and they have released two albums and 3 mixtapes. At the age of 22 she gave birth to her daughter Chai who is fathered by her crew member DL. After Chai's birth she shifted her focus a bit from music and worked as a teller at Standard Bank. Presently they are working on their third album due for release in 2011.

The documentary film is titled *Lyricism and other Skizims* as its primary focus is on the practice of word play and attaining lyrical skill. But as the title also suggests the focus on lyricism also opens up a discussion on other skizims that plague the Hip Hop culture. 'Skizims' in this sense refers to schism- which means divisions, splits or breaks within something. The seemingly straight forward topic unravels a complex interconnected web of themes that come into play in Hip Hop's politics and practice. One of the skizims that reigned supreme was the issue of gender relations within the culture.

From the initial interviews conducted with the participants it was more than evident that gender politics were unavoidable in the study of South African Hip Hop. Though rebelling from mainstream Hip Hop's misogynistic stance and inequality, the female participants in underground Hip Hop still had the same struggles as those faced by female participants of mainstream Hip Hop facing them from their own male peers who are supposed to be opposing the same societal ideologies as them. The double marginalization I spoke about earlier comes into play here, alongside many other struggles that these female MCs face. Through their words and lyrics they address many issues that they face on a daily. They use their vocabulary and

voices to educate others about female soci-economic and political issues. All three MCs acknowledge the gender divisions in underground Hip Hop.

In the documentary film Q'ba proclaims that in Hip Hop culture males disregard females. She also talks about how she became an MC. As a head strong feminist she could not accept being told that she cannot achieve something because she is a female so she wrote her first verse and challenged those male MCs that claimed she would fail. Her determination to change perception has afforded her a high ranking status as an MC in the Gauteng locality. In the documentary a snippet from one of the Splash Jam sessions shows Q'ba walking through a mostly male dominated crowd of dancing Hip Hop heads. The next shot is of the same session from an angle facing the DJ booth. Behind the DJ there is a massive drop down banner of Q'ba dropping from the roof all the way down to the floor of the building. The banner towers above everyone in the session. With this situation we are given a glimpse at the enormity of Q'bas' success as an MC.

Arazen to some extent opposes Q'bas proclamation that males disregard women who rap but rather that it is actually a matter of interest more then male chauvinism. She was introduced to Hip Hop by her brother who encouraged her to read and write. Her argument is strengthened by Shorty Skillz (a well known MC who has been rapping for 15 years) where he says "*you know how Hip Hop is; you need to really love your stuff and listen. You know some honeys are there just to freak* (have fun*).*" Arazen further suggests that it may be because of the topics that Hip Hop is known for that makes it a 'mostly male accommodating' lifestyle which then becomes unappealing to women. Arazens' argument is not a total disregard of Q'ba's views as she also

acknowledges at other points in the documentary film that, Hip Hop being a mostly male dominated culture makes being a female MC hard as at times she feels that she needs to prove herself twice as hard. She also acknowledges the disregard that Q'ba talks about when she says that when female MCs try to get onto the mic there is usually a negative energy, exuding from the mostly male audience, which can infect you and your confidence.

Shorty Skillz further states that, it is struggle for both sexes to gain respect and recognition in the culture by saying that they (male MCs) were also faced with a number of difficulties when they started up as MCs. The people around their townships would call them 'bom rapper' or amanigga, as a way of discouraging them, but through continued persistence they gained their respect from their society and street cred(credit) from other MCs, and this is a challenge that all MCs need to face and overcome. Personally does not feel that there is gender inequality in conscious Hip Hop.

In the documentary the general consensus between the MCs is that being a dope MC or lyricist goes far beyond gender. Q'ba says *"Male, female it don't matter. It's about who is dropping the illest rhymes, who is dropping the illest mix tape"* so at the end of the day what matters is not who says what but what who is saying. Regardless of your gender to be considered dope or ill (terms used in the culture that mean very good or dexterous) you must exhibit a number of qualities.

> Lyricism is the mirrors image of an MCs soul
> Poured out onto the paper
> transformed into ink transmitting

Into ones mind, one of a kind
With punching lines and
Metaphors' that will lock your doors
like trilidoors
Getting locked down
That's what a true MC has
The ability to capture the soul
Capture control matter fact just stand there
Hold the attention of the crowd
Like it was an ornament for display
But this is not the type of shit all these other MCs weigh
Original would say

**(Freestyle from Mr Foster 2010)**

Lyricism then becomes the way you create, package and structure your words in order to deliver the message, not only for its relevance but also for the skill of the delivery. When the research initiated the aim was to looking at lyricism within conscious Hip Hop in general. The objective was to totally disregard gender politics and just look at how lyricism works for MCs of both sexes. Even though the characters specifically chosen are all female MCs the aim is to just concentrate on lyricism alone but told from a female perspective. Zephmetric states that *"at the end of the day lyricism is about rapping, being relevant and staying relevant"*. The questions now then become what is relevance and are these female MCs relevant? Firstly how is relevance measured; and what is relevance?

To attempt to answer the questions above the research will now analyze the texts compiled in the creation of the documentary film. The first question actively asked in the documentary film is "why are lyrics important to you?" Q'ba answered by saying *"I tell stories, play with words, come up with rhymes, and rap."* And Arazen proclaims that *"Lyrics are important because that is how I understand life. My language is sound and words"*

Words are the foundation of lyricism and lyrical skill is the way you play with the words whilst creating a constructive message. So what do these women do with their words?

"Like their male counterparts, women rap about aspects of inner-city life and their desire to be number one; unlike [some] male MCs they shed light on everyday realities from a woman's perspective" (Keyes 2002:186). Zephmetric being the only female MC in her MC crew finds that even though 'there is no difference between male and female MCs, the content is not the same. The approach to a topic and the general topics that they chose to concern themselves about are different. In challenging the predominance of male rappers, female rap artists have not only proven that they have lyrical skillz but in their struggle to survive and thrive within this tradition they have created spaces from which to deliver powerful messages from black female and feminist viewpoints (Keyes 2002:186).

Zephmetric is concerned with fulfilling the Hip Hop Credo 'each one teach one' she expresses her need to teach about the black female experience in contemporary South Africa using rap and lyricism as a pedagogical tool. In the documentary she expresses her hope to one day, through a Hip Hop lifestyle, teach her child humility, responsibility and self expression. She explains the Hip Hop lifestyle as one of continuous teaching and hopes that one day her daughter will understand her lyrics and mission through Hip Hop. Q'ba says she gets her inspiration from reality. She writes about life experiences, being female, being a mother, about money about her society, her dreams and her aspirations. The other two MCs also write about similar issues and feel that the issues they concern themselves with make them relevant as MCs.

The second performance in the documentary is from Smerf, he is male MC who has much street cred(credit) in the underground circles. The reason I chose to include the male MCs in the research is because I want to look at lyricism in conscious Hip Hop in a holistic manner and not to have them speak for the female MCs. Smerf concerns himself with important issues as well that are relevant to this research.

This one goes out to
Lovers of Hip Hop if you
On Friday afternoon
who be kicking like kung fu
Coz you looking for a
Hip Hop session to bob your head to
Let it stimulate your mind body and soul dude
coz when I touch this music it touches you
Getting inside you invading the mind too
Rhythm plays in your head;
Leaving only when it wants to
As much as I like to listen I like to look
At all the gals getting down to the club music
I like the ways they make their
booty shake when they move it
Up and down back and forth in a tight move
But you can't shake your ass
forever so don't loose it
I don't repeat myself on a track
this is not Kwaito
I don't repeat myself on a track
this is not Kwaito
But on the real I write songs
we can raise kids on
So when all is gone Hip Hop will live on
Don't get me wrong
I got no beef with commercialness
But I think there is more to Hip Hop
than bling at a high expense
But don't get twisted this is not a defense
There's nothing wrong with making money
But first we got to make sense

**(Smerf – Acapella Dungeon Shack 2009).**

Issues that stand out from this verse are female subjectivity and commercialism. *"As much as I like to listen I like to look; At all the gals getting down to the club music; I like the way they make their booty bounce when they move it; Up and down back and forth; But you can't shake your ass forever so don't lose it"* These lines show the general perception of both male and female conscious Hip Hop practitioners. Gangster rap reduces the female body to its erotic parts and here Smerf admits that as much as it maybe pleasurable for him as a male to look at self objectification, women must be fully aware that in life they need more than their bodies to succeed. Once you lose your bodily assets to time, then what? By putting your mind and not just your body into action so much more can be achieved.

The second issue of conscious Hip Hops anti- commercial stance comes out in these lines- *"But I think there is more to Hip Hop than bling at a high expense; "before we make money first we got to make sense"*. The preference of producing sensible "cultural expressions that are not co-opted by corporate marketing agendas" (Haupt 2008:143), is a view that is also resonated by Zephmetric in the progression of the documentary film. On an off camera interview she acknowledges that Hip Hop will not make her money so she would rather carry on working at the bank then to sell out her music.

In the documentary she talks to Sizakele about the pressure of maintaining a relevant message as a female MC, in order to avoid typecasting of female MCs. The two also point out an important factor that shows the unfair balances between female and male MCs, Sizakele notes that if DL (one of the male MCs in Zephmetrics' crew) would produce two tracks on different polarities,

criticism for him would not be as bad as it would be for Zephmetric. Even if she maintained her look and just spoke about other issues like finding love in the club, she would be considered vocal booty but she also argues that why would you even want to take such a route as an MC. It's all about originality and staying fresh, so how can you dope if you keep regurgitating things that have been done before.

The girls all agree that it is important for them to always make sense and making sense to them is speaking about realistic matters. Sizakele says that everyone needs to be responsible for whatever they say as they can all be held accountable for their words. She points out that some of the MCs are mothers and that makes them a big influence to another generation. Their main objective should be to educate because whatever they say their children will take from it. So best they draw from positive words. Smerf also addresses this point when he says "*But on the real; I write songs we can raise kids on; So when all else is gone Hip Hop will live on*" The music that conscious MCs produce is meant to positively build society and spread positive and relevant messages. The underground MCs are like this not because they are not making money from their music, but that they would rather use their art in sensible manner unlike commercial Hip Hop MCs who don't concern themselves with sensible rhymes but would rather make silly music that will be only for entertainment value and not educative in anyway.

Arazen drops a freestyle just after Smerf's verse. Freestyle is when one just raps from the top of the head it can be seen as improvisation because the MC needs to be on point with rhyme scheme and constructing lines that make sense without showing that this is not a prewritten verse.

Freestyles usually work with a topic being provided then the MC creating his/her freestyle around that topic. That is how Arazens freestyle was tackled she considered the topics addressed in this research; lyricism from a female trajectory.

Testing; testing, is this a new resting?
Coz we gona be blazing in few minutes,
so you can tire,
We're no squire for hire
But we put words together
as though they were on hire
for a desire for popularity
but We bring more scrutiny
to all of those who want to find solidarity
inside insecurity
That's why our words are brutally lyricism,
we gona open up a casim and put a skizm in between your lips
or perhaps some higher grade ganja for your spliff
This is not what we do
even if you give me a gift of your ear
I will sneer into it with these lines
There will be no hide in your skin
Once we take it to the beginning
Of this phrase which is a clause
Binding you to the meaning behind words
Behind a long skirt; Under there is secrecy
Lyrically free and mentally easy Going with my steeze
You don't even have to or got to
Act like little weezy shame that shit is dizzy,
He needs to be more like us spitting
With the saliva going down our lips so easy
our rhyms leave you feeling queezy
like someone on their periods Menstrual cycle
can we get another rival for our own disputes

**(Arazen Frestyle 2010)**

The biggest challenge that a freestyle MC faces is making sense right through the freestyle. In this freestyle Arazen does not succeed in making sense the entire verse instead she crutches with finding rhyming words that maintain her rhyming scheme. That is not to say that her freestyle is

just composed of words that rhyme. She has a few lines that make sense like "*Testing; testing, is this a new resting? Coz we gona be blazing in few minutes, so you can tire; We're no squire for hire; But we put words together as though they were on hire; for a desire for popularity*

*But we bring more scrutiny to all of those who want to find solidarity inside insecurity"*

These lines are alerting the listener that they (female MC s) are here and what is about to follow is from them and about them. She says that they are not apprentices (for men) in this field and they use words as if they are being paid to do it like those who do it for fame and money (commercial heads) instead they scrutinize those heads who are not real and are considered insecure because their music is preoccupied with painting false self portraits. The trick to understanding an MC is to look deeper into what they say. What they say is not always straight forward; they love to use poetic and metaphorical lines that require engaging with their texts in order to decipher it. That is one of the qualities that make one a dope mc, the ability of word play. She furthers her attack on commercial Hip Hop by referring to mainstream Hip Hop's current best selling artists Lil Weezy. She proclaims that her words have more depth than his as their affect can result in one feeling unsettled after you hear her message. Her words will move you and changeling your conceptions of the world as they dispute hegemonic structures.

One major issue that the documentary film addresses is the language debate. Hip Hop is an art form that promotes expression it is also a platform that MCs use in their quest to be heard. It is widely accepted as an American culture that has been adopted globally and with its' adoption adaptation and indigenization take place. The characters are at different viewpoints with

language. Zephmetric feels that vernacular rap is not Hip Hop but it is more like Kwaito. This view is shared by many heads and Arazen explains why some heads think this way. She suggests that it is because of our post colonial mind set we are conditioned to accept English as the global language of expression. English is the lingua franca of South Africa but is not by any means the universal language of expression.

Sizakele also notes that because of the depths of our society's colonial conditioning it is not that we prefer to express ourselves in English but rather that we don't have the proper linguistic control of our own languages. Arazen agrees with this. She confesses that she finds it easier to express herself in English then in her home language which is Setswana, because she thinks and talks mostly in English. This echoes Wa Thiong'o's disputation that the most successful means via which Western colonizers secured power was not military or political ascendancy, but a colonization of colonial subjects' minds. The colonizer was successful in capturing our minds and through imperialism they made us put dominance on what is theirs over our own.

Sizakele finds this as a weakness because she believes that an individual's home language has more depth and allows for better expression than English does, she also suggests that it also makes it easier for elders to except Hip Hop as a South African culture when its adherents use the country's vernaculars. She makes an example with Zulu Boy (a South African MC who mixes Zulu with a little English in his rhymes) who she believes that what makes him commercially successful and widely excepted by elders, as an underground MC is because his Hip Hop is accessible to the South African majorities who understand and\or speak Zulu.

Zulu Boy exploits an arena not fully explored by most conscious MCs and it has afforded him much commercial success. Zulu Boy is not the only MC who has done this though, in recent years we have witnessed an emergence of vernacular rap sub-groups in South African Hip Hop. Motswako from Mafikeng is Tswana rap pioneered by the likes of Hip Hop Pantsula commonly known as HHP and Memolema who is by profession a farmer. Spaza Rap from the Eastern Cape is Xhosa rap forged by groups such as Driemansskaap and individuals like Rattex. Shweshwe rap is Sotho rap with pioneers like Mathematics. Recently there has also been a few rising MCs using Tshonga, Swati and Venda as their language of delivery.

Arazen also believes that by being limited to English rap they are not doing justice to South African Hip Hop. They should be representing South Africa in a more authentic way and vernacular is authentically South African. Q'ba states that she is authentically South African even though her rhymes her mostly in English. What makes her authentic is that she speaks about and addresses South Africans. She also has a rhyme in her song *Kasi Shit* that says *"I speak in English but on that kasi shit"* her expression is not affected by her language because she gets her point perfectly across.

## CONCLUSION

Conscious Hip Hop provides a positive alternative for South African underground Hip Hop artists, to interacting with social constructs. “Whilst it is largely true that a significant aspect of Hip Hop culture has been co-opted by the mainstream media, certain forms of Hip Hop continue to offer meaningful avenues of expression and critical engagement for a specific set of subjects. This is ‘partly’ because ‘conscious’ Hip Hop artists have aligned their work as artists with their identities as activists and educators” (Haupt 2008:217). This research has shown that conscious Hip Hop acts as a form of activism that’s aims to deconstruct the dominate ideology. It acts as a useful tool for the youth to express themselves in a manner that both entertains and educates. It shows that conscious Hip Hop provides a much needed platform to question and shape various contexts that mainstream media does not prioritize.

Space and place are important concepts in Hip Hop culture as Hip Hop is a street culture and conscious Hip Hop instills a sense of pride in the social realities that their society faces. Hip Hop draws inspiration from their regional affiliations and its adherents put precedence on the local and its significance resonates in their music with explicit references to particular streets, boulevards and neighborhoods, telephone area codes, postal service zip codes, or other socio-spatial information, as well as certain symbolic gestures and hand signs that are used to signify a certain symbolic affiliation with a particular place.

Sub-cultures have the power of creating a sense of communal acceptance in the imaginary of the participants which results in formations of ‘imagined communities’. This creates spaces of cohesion where adherents find commonality in shared view points and preferences. Within this ‘imagined community’ they find recognition and common ground with people who share their views which mostly contest dominate society’s ideologies. This sense of community is important especially in the underground movement as the participants need to feel unified in their struggle of contesting hegemonic structures and thought systems.

The world is built on patriarchal ideologies which filter into all spheres of human productions. As humans living within this framework it is understandable that we produce from an ideological standing that we’ve been conditioned by, and Hip Hop being a human production is also not exempt from this. The female MCs views on gender relation assert that within Hip Hop gender relations is a contestable issue as the underground claims to be a space of equality yet dominate thought on gender relations appears in form of how hard it is for adherents to accept female MCs as lyricists. The women are able to rise above this though, by not accepting that status quo as a norm. Q’bas success as a female MC proves that gender does not determine ones success within underground Hip Hop but it is ones lyrics, delivery and message that shape your success. It is a package of flow, beats, style, approach and word play.

Authenticity being another issue that is taken with deadly seriousness becomes problematized in a seemingly conflicting issue with language use. The insistence of keeping to ‘the real’ is challenged by the preference of using English by many MCs. An argument of the depth of

authenticity then arises, where other MCs view use of vernacular languages as an imperative subject in the indigenization of Hip Hop. The other view is that it essentially all boils down to preferred language of expression and seeing that English is also one of South Africa's official languages; their raps are also authentic therefore making them 'real' as well.

By looking at the three female MCs Q'ba Arazen and Zephmetric the research points out a number of issues within Hip Hop that are expressed, challenged and interrogated through their works. It also demonstrates that to be an accredited MC goes beyond gender but is measured by many other issues and most importantly the relevance of one's message. The documentary film wraps up with general comments about Hip Hop as a lifestyle that the MCs will live with and hopefully pass on to their children. They feel that it is a lifestyle characterized by teaching and they contribute to this knowledge dispensing through lyricism.

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