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"It Ain't Shit About the Music!"

Discussions on Freedom of Expression in Relation to Rap Music in Social Work

Vignette: a bullet for Messerschmidt

In the summer of 2009 a social youth project working with production of rap music in a suburban socioeconomically disadvantaged area in Denmark was closed and a rap coach was fired, because of a song called "Messerschmidt Diss", written by one of the under-age participants. When the lyrics of the song were printed as part of a newspaper article about the project, it ignited a debate in the Danish media, where the young rapper was accused of expressing death threats against the right-wing nationalist politician Morten Messerschmidt, a member of The Danish People's Party. The lyrics causing the controversy were: "I've got a single bullet for Morten Messerschmidt / 'cause he talks a lot of shit / he should come and suck my dick."[1]

The public debate regarding "Messerschmidt Diss" raised a series of critical questions regarding the widespread use of rap music as a resource in social work with youngsters, primarily ethnic minority boys – a creative, process-oriented form of social work, which had gained increasing support from the Danish Ministry of Integration, local municipalities and councils as well as various private organizations and foundations since the mid-2000s. The critical questions came from different positions and had various approaches to rap music as a social resource. Some voices asked whether rap music was an appropriate means to an end, when working with young people on the margins of society, describing rap as an "extreme" kind of music that "glorified violence and sexism": No matter whether the death threat against Morten Messerschmidt was literal or an example of a violent metaphor, would it at least not be the rap coaches' job to remove such expressions from the young rappers' repertoire? Other voices interpreted the closing of the project and the dismissal of the rap coach – as well as the accusations against the young rapper (and later against the rap coach)[2] – as a moral panic: Couldn't the young boy's musical expression actually be understood as a means to process frustrations that he might otherwise have expressed in other – perhaps more physical – directions? Others again asked whether there was a point in taking such amateur-rap seriously at all.

1 My translation of the original Danish lyrics: "Jeg har en enkelt patron for Morten Messerschmidt / for han snakker masser shit / han sku' kom' og sut min pik" ("Messerschmidt Diss").

2 During the debate the dismissed rap coach took responsibility for the lyrics. He recorded the rap song "Messerschmidt Diss" himself, and uploaded it on YouTube as a call out for freedom of expression (cf. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAnDzRGVneg).

Introduction: contextualising "Messerschmidt Diss"

The case of "Messerschmidt Diss" and the closing of the rap school is an isolated incident. However, it echoed among the many project managers and rap coaches using rap music in social work all over Denmark, and led to a heightened awareness of the balance between the controlling and regulating aspects of an enlightening education on the one hand – and the act of giving the young rappers a free voice on the other. The case was also discussed at the social project, where I happened to be engaged as a vocal coach at the time. It was my work there, the meetings with the participants and the rap coaches, and the inside knowledge of the social work that initially stirred my interest for this topic, and eventually led to several years of field research in and around various projects using rap music production as a social resource.[3]

Social activism and education have been key components of hip hop since it was placed on the map as a vibrant subculture in New York in the 1970s. Focusing on overcoming the negative with the positive, one of the most famous of the hip hop pioneers, Afrika Bambaataa, founded the global organization Zulu Nation in order to empower kids and youngsters of the Bronx by use of aesthetic skills, political knowledge and awareness, thus mobilizing hip hop as a social movement and a tool for oppressed social groups.[4] Since then hip hop – and rap music not least – has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identities all over the world.[5]

Because of the commodification of hip hop, critics have noted that hip hop and rap music have become sites of contestation with a corporate music industry, incredibly adept at redirecting hip hop's social energies away from critical expressions of struggle, protest, and resistance – and towards messages of materialism, greed, individualism and the depiction of stereotypical racial and sexual identities, tacitly accepting misogyny and male sexism as well as masculine aggression and violence. However, beyond such characterizations there is an emergent hip hop culture driven by socially engaged people who find that the music industry has sold hip hop out, and who struggle to hold on to and maintain the social transformative powers and political agencies of the cultural form.[6] For these people rap and hip hop are not just artistic

3 Between 2010-2014 I have conducted participant observation among rap artists with ethnic minority background, primarily those with Middle Eastern background, focusing on the role that rap music has in the tension between inclusion and exclusion of ethnic minorities in Denmark. Among other things I have participated in social projects involving rap music production (some of which are now closed) and interviewed rap coaches, project managers and participants affiliated these. All the interviews were conducted in Danish, and the quoted statements in this article are my translations. Due to confidentiality of the under-age rappers participating in the projects, these – as well as the names of the projects – are rendered anonymous.

4 Jeff Chang, *Can't stop won't stop. A history of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin, 2005); David Toop, *Rap attack, No. 3. African rap to global hip hop* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000).

5 Tony Mitchell, "Introduction. Another Root – Hip-Hop outside the USA," in *Global Noice. Rap and Hip-Hop outside the USA*, ed. Tony Mitchell (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

6 Murray Forman, "'Hood Work: Hip-Hop, Youth Advocacy, and Model Citizenry," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 6 (2013), 252-253; Michael Viola and Brad J. Porfilio, "Hip-Hop(e): The Cultural Practice and Critical Pedagogy of International Hip-Hop," in *Hip-Hop(e): The Cultural Practice and Critical Pedagogy of International Hip-Hop*, ed. Brad J. Porfilio and Michael J. Viola (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012), 5-6.

and creative expressions, but also practices that inform the articulation of collective political agency as well as the performance and communication of politicized subjectivities.[7] The use of rap music as a social means in what Murray Forman refers to as "'Hood work"[8] evolving around educational and pro-social messaging for marginalized youths, is an example of this mobilized activism and community organizing.[9]

In Denmark, the institutionalized use of rap music as an after-school activity, locally based in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas with a high percentage of people with ethnic and religious minority backgrounds, has been increasing since the mid-2000s.[10] Managed by well-educated and socioeconomically advantaged rappers or producers – or sometimes by people working with multicultural issues – in their 20s, 30s or 40s, this social work varies between one-man work in small studios, sometimes connected to local youth clubs, and greater associations with their own facilities and many employees. Generally speaking, empowerment emerges as the dominant discourse. But where some projects link empowerment to issues of self-esteem and individualized optimism, others align empowerment with more established practices of political communication and principles of community organizing, sometimes adopting the term "raptivism".

Despite various differences between the projects in terms of management and the approaches they apply, the fact that they receive public funding suggests that the production of rap music is thought of as an useful resource for creating powerful projects of inclusion and multiplicity. Both mission statements of the projects and the various internal documents that I have been granted access to during my research seem to reflect this official discourse on rap's usefulness, adapting language that highlights the personal, social and societal benefits of keeping the youth off the streets and empowering them through acknowledgement by means of cultural education within a subculture that they are already part of or related to. Moreover, it is emphasized how the participants are enabled, through the projects, to act as role models in and mouthpieces for their neighborhoods.

The increased public economic support for the use of rap music in social work can be understood within the context of Danish integration policy strategies during the recent decades. In this period – and not least after 9/11 and the Danish cartoon crisis

7 Andreana Clay, *The hip-hop generation fights back: Youth, activism, and post-civil rights politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

8 Forman, "'Hood Work: Hip-Hop, Youth Advocacy, and Model Citizenry," 245.

9 The present article focuses on the use of rap music in social after-school activities – and not rap music as part of school curricula. At the moment, however, there is a growing body of initiatives of so-called hip hop based education (HHBE) in Danish Schools. For further reading on HHBE in an American context, see Marc Lamount Hill, *Beats, rhymes, and classroom life: Hip-hop pedagogy and the politics of identity* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009) and Emery Petchauer, "Framing and reviewing hip-hop educational research," *Review of Educational Research* 79:2 (2009).

10 For an early sociological study on the use of rap music in social work in Denmark, see Sune Qvotrup Jensen and Kirsten Hviid, "Perkerrap, ghettostøj og socialt arbejde. Om gadekulturen og rapmusikkens potentialer i socialt arbejde med 'vilde' unge," *Social Kritik* 89 (2003). For an ongoing sociopedagogical practice study of the rap project Livsbanen, see for instance Lea Eckert Elkjær and Gry Tybjerg Holm, "I LIVSBANEN lever unge deres drømme ud," *Social Kritik* 134 (2013).

in 2005[11] – various notions of identity, belonging and everyday relations between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities have marked the public debate.

Among other things, a "semantic density"[12] has been constructed around the category "immigrant" (as well as "foreigner", "second-generation immigrant" and other entry-appellations), which has become almost synonymous with people of Muslim faith.[13] At the same time, public representation of Middle Eastern people in Denmark has increasingly been linked to orientalistic, stereotypical images of Muslims as personified symbols of terror, enemies or "radical others".[14] This link has created a symbolic and stereotypical polarity between "us", the Danes, and "them", the others, indicating that Muslim identity is inconsistent with a Danish identity.

Furthermore, it has induced a political relation between migration, integration and national security questions.[15] One of the effects has been an ongoing process of securitization, where, among other things, a security dimension has been layered onto pre-existing concerns about integration, melding parallel concerns about immigration, crime and associations between Muslims and violence.[16] The Danish state's so-called "security/integration response"[17] to the internationally significant events of 9/11 has led to several policies and legislations – e.g. administrative expulsion, temporarily legalizing body search without probable cause within certain urban areas, the abolishment of compulsory mother tongue education in schools, the introduction of a new citizenship examination etc.[18] Furthermore, various pre-emptive measures and plans of action have been implemented. These include anti-radicalization programs, in which for instance so-called "front-line personnel of the welfare state" (such as teachers and social workers) are trained to prevent and take action against processes of religious radicalization and other potential threats.[19]

11 For further information about the Danish cartoon crisis, see Peter Hervik, "The Danish Muhammad Cartoon Conflict," in *Current Themes in Imer Research, Number 13*. (Malmö: Malmö University, 2012).

12 Edwin Ardener, "Social Anthropology, Language and Reality," in *Semantic Anthropology*, ed. David Parkin (London: Academic Press, 1982).

13 Kirsten Hastrup, *Kultur. Det Fleksible Fællesskab* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2007), 105.

14 Lasse Koefoed and Kirsten Simonsen, *"Den fremmede", byen og nationen – om livet som etnisk minoritet* (Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 2010), 63-64.

15 Ulrik Pram Gad, "Muslimer som trussel. Identitet, sikkerhed og modforanstaltninger," in *Islam og muslimer i Danmark. Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, ed. Marianne Holm Pedersen, and Mikkel Rytter (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2011), 76-77.

16 Erik Bleich, "Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West: Introduction," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35:3 (2009): 355.

17 Ibid.

18 Gad, "Muslimer som trussel. Identitet, sikkerhed og modforanstaltninger"; Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, "Islam og muslimer i Danmark. Udviklinger efter den 11. september 2001," in *Islam og muslimer i Danmark. Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, ed. Marianne Holm Pedersen, and Mikkel Rytter (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2011); Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, "A decade of suspicion: Islam and Muslims in Denmark after 9/11," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2013).

19 Lene Kühle, "Radikalisering: Ekstremisme eller vækkelse? En undersøgelse af aarhusianske muslimers holdninger," in *Islam og muslimer i Danmark. Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, ed. Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2011), 91-93.

These restricting political initiatives have had huge effects on the everyday lives of ethnic minorities, especially people with a Middle Eastern and/or Muslim background, who as a consequence of the securitization have become hyper-visible and subjected to scrutiny as problematic stereotyped others.[20] Thus, feelings of exclusion seem to have affected the positions and sense of belonging of people with a Middle Eastern appearance, not least the younger generation, who have almost no other experience than being cast as "the usual suspects".[21] For some, such experiences lead to dissociation with Denmark and Danish identity.

Activating rap music as a tool through which these "usual suspects" are urged to express themselves – and where social workers (front-line personnel) in and around the musical production process itself can influence the youngsters positively – might be interpreted as a pre-emptive measure of socioeconomic interest for the Danish society and a way to mediate between the life worlds of these young people and the Danish society.

However, such use of rap as a social resource, exhibiting an obvious socioeconomic agenda, raises questions about freedom of expression as well as about conceptions of the capacity of rap music for reaching out to the target group. Based on material collected during my field research, the aim of this article is to examine how the socioeconomic goals of the projects assert influence on the musical expressions produced within the context of social work and to discuss how the rap coaches' different conceptions of rap music's usefulness affect the agencies available to the participants in the projects.

Rap as a mediator in the field of integration politics

According to Stuart Hall, identities – or identifications – are constructed within discursive practices as temporary attachments to the subject position. Thus, they are always the results of a successful articulation of the subject into the flow of the discourse.[22] However, for many people with an ethnic minority background, the identification as Danish is not always successfully received within the discourse where it is articulated. Because of experiences of such unsuccessful articulations, many young people do not bother to identify themselves as Danes. As most of these youngsters are born or have grown up in Denmark, and only have a peripheral relation to their so-called country of origin, they live in a condition of what Homi Bhabha defines as "unhomeliness". An "unhomed" subject physically lives in a certain place, but figuratively he or she inhabits a space in-between, obstructing the subject's sense of belonging socially and culturally.[23]

20 Iram Khawaja, "Blikkene. Muslimskhedens synlighed, kropslighed og forhandling," in *Islam og muslimer i Danmark. Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, ed. Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2011).

21 Pedersen and Rytter, "A decade of suspicion: Islam and Muslims in Denmark after 9/11," 16.

22 Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall, and Paul du Gay (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 6.

23 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routhledge Classics, 2004), 13.

The self-identification as a "*perker*" (originally an ethnic slur in the Danish language) functioning as a reappropriation of otherness and a distancing to what is "Danish", seems to be a strategy for some young people to deal with feelings of exclusion and for trying to sustain a sense of agency in their lives.[24]

In creating an identity as a "*perker*", hip hop and rap music seem to be important tools. The rap coach Zaki, who also works as a playwright and an actor, has described how ethnic minority youngsters according to him often strategically use rap in their identity work and as a response to the Danish integration policies:

> We have to do certain things to be real foreigners, otherwise you are integrated, and then you are suddenly something totally different, then you are in some kind of vacuum, and then what the hell are you? You have said goodbye to your base, but you haven't really got any other country. Well, so you have to shave your head, wear street wear and listen to hip hop and rap. You can't for instance play rock music and have long hair.[25]

Zaki's words exemplify John Street's argument, that music – in this specific case rap music – embodies political values and experiences, organizing our responses to society as political thought and action. Thus, the music is not just a vehicle for political expression, "it *is* that expression."[26] Following John Street's argument about music being at "the heart of political life,"[27] rap music may thus be seen as central to the political scene of integration.

It has often been suggested that hip hop and rap music have evolved as a kind of lingua franca among urban youngsters on a global scale, encompassing mobility of immigrant and refugee youth.[28] The origin of the aesthetic expression of hip hop and rap music among marginalized African-Americans in America's big cities, rap's claim to be on (and about) the street as well as a persistent image of the genre as the political mouthpiece of "the ghetto" seem to have led the way for the use of rap music among groups feeling marginalized in other contexts. In this sense hip hop appears as a counterculture, sometimes giving rise to explicit political resistance, sometimes just emphasizing an opposition to the established, the neat, the politically correct etc. – as does every counterculture.[29]

According to Stuart Hall difference and otherness are of central importance in popular culture when seen as a field where struggle over meaning takes place. In this sense popular culture is "the arena of consent and resistance"[30] that opens onto a "politics

24 For a further discussion of the "*perker* identity", see Kristine Ringsager, ""I Wanna Be a Dark-Skinned Pork Roast" – and other stories about how 'dark' Danish rappers negotiate otherness in their marketing and music productions," *CyberOrient*, vol. 7, iss. 2 (2013).

25 Zaki, interviewed by author, June 18, 2012.

26 John Street, *Music and Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 1.

27 Ibid., 22.

28 Forman, "'Hood Work: Hip-Hop, Youth Advocacy, and Model Citizenry", 249.

29 Mads Krogh and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen, "Hiphop i Skandinavien," in *Hiphop i Skandinavien*, ed. Mads Krogh and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2008), 11.

30 Stuart Hall, "Notes on deconstructing 'the popular'," in *Cultural theory and popular culture: A reader*, ed. John Storey (New York: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 1998), 453.

of representation".[31] As such the field of hip hop and rap music is very much a venue where struggles over representation of ethnic minority boys take place. Here, social workers can influence the way these boys think of themselves and the way they choose to depict themselves musically by trying to influence their creative musical articulations.

Echoing such thought on representation, Tia DeNora has argued that music acts as a resource and progenitor of individual agency and thus also operates as a force for social ordering at the level of collectivities as well as that of individual behavior: in other words, as a mediator of social agency or social situations.[32] In this context the rap coach Babak explains, how he experiences that (African-American) commercial rap music portraying the stereotypical outlaw "nigga" is often interpreted and reflected in relation to personal experiences by many young people with ethnic minority backgrounds, who live out the identity of "gangster" through the music:

> No matter which ghetto you enter, the kids will put G after their names. Ahmed G, Muhammed G, Abdi G – everybody G. G for 'gangster'. It says a lot when for instance a 6-year-old says 'G' about himself, right? […] Their identities are developed around the so-called rap culture stressing topics as 'I'm tough,' 'we shoot in the ghettos,' 50Cent lyrics and that stuff. Not that they'll do it because 50Cent says it, but the music you listen to, and what you identify with creates a kind of frame for your life.[33]

It is important to emphasize that "music in itself 'makes nothing happen'," [34] as DeNora suggests, and that it is the music in "specific contexts, as framed and consumed, that holds power 'over' its recipients."[35] Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan argue that both the context of individual and collective memories, and the concrete musical situation and its power relations are always crucial for the emotions produced by the music consuming individual.[36] When youngsters within the communities of ethnic minority groups listen to African-American commercial gangster-rap or produce and listen to what is often referred to as "*perker* rap"[37] the music accordingly is interpreted in the context of these people's personal experiences of living "in a society where you feel that your identity and your skin color are unwanted,"[38] as the rap coach Ali, who also has managed several local rap projects, puts it. According to Ali such musical ex-

31 Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 277.

32 Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 160.

33 Babak, interviewed by author, July 8, 2010.

34 Tia DeNora, "Music and Emotion in Real Time," in *Consuming Music Together. Social and Collaborative Aspects of Music Consumption Technologies*, ed. Kenton O'Hara and Barry Brown (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 21.

35 Ibid.

36 Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan, *Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 144.

37 Rap performed from a position as *"perker"* – partly reflecting and commenting on, partly staging, capitalising and dramatizing this position. Cf. Sune Qvotrup Jensen, "8210-Cent, Perker4livet Og Thug-Gangsta," in *Hiphop I Skandinavien*, ed. Mads Krogh and Birgitte Stougaard Perdersen (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2008).

38 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.

pressions can then intensify the feelings "that they are only hanging in there, that they fight every day, and that they have to protect themselves from being crushed by all their problems."[39] Accordingly, musical expressions such as "*perker* rap" can contribute in the creation and/or maintenance of a collective identity in opposition to the national Danish one. In this sense, as Martin Stokes also suggests, the physical realization of feelings of community, are also situations and events where hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed and where boundaries between "us" and "them" are established and maintained.[40]

Because music is active in individual identity work as well as in constructions of community, control over music, as DeNora points out, is an opportunity to structure the parameters of action and a source of social power.[41] In trying to affect the very musical expressions of the young rappers and by introducing political or conscious alternatives to the "gangster-*perker* rap", the rap coaches and social projects can not only affect the identity processes of the individual participating rappers, but potentially also the social situations in which the rap songs are produced and performed. Thus rap music production can work as a potential social catalyst and be a powerful resource in mediating between the life-worlds of young rappers and the agenda of specific projects, all of them emanating from and funded by a Danish social beneficial rap-as-resource policy platform.

Rap production as a project of personal formation

> There are two reasons, why it [rap music] is so insanely powerful in terms of integration. One is that you don't have to lure the kids to come. Give them an open studio and they crowd around it. The second is, that if you wanna learn to rap, it's of no use if you don't speak Danish. Then you have to learn to fucking articulate yourself, right? You can rap without being able to articulate yourself, but then it's just not cool […] Being able to articulate yourself is maybe the most important thing in society. That's the first step. If you can't articulate yourself, it'll go wrong.[42]

Besides rap's apparent usefulness as a popular cultural form, the rap coach Babak quoted above also points out that what makes rap music a useful socioeconomic resource in the context of integration politics is that the young rappers have to learn to articulate themselves and to speak better Danish in order to become good rappers.

According to the rap coaches and project managers, I have spoken with during my field research, a huge part of the strategy in using rap music in social work is to use the musical – and especially the lyrical – production to encourage the young rappers

39 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.
40 Martin Stokes, "Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music," in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), 3-6.
41 DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 20.
42 Babak, interviewed by author, July 8, 2010.

to reflect upon themselves as subjects, upon the society in which they live and upon themselves as social agents in this society. The rap coaches try to influence the associations, reflections and evaluations of the music that the participants listen to and are inspired by – as well as the music they produce themselves and hereby also the identity they articulate and live out through that music. Furthermore, as also shown by sociolinguistics Andreas Stæhr and Lian Malai Madsen, rap coaches often urge the young rappers to express themselves in a more standardized Danish and, in the name of success and intelligibility, to use majority-language terms rather than bringing indexes of minority status and youth culture to the front stage.[43]Like many other of the rap coaches, I have spoken with, the rap coach and project manager, Joseph, sees his work with the young boys as "primarily a pedagogically directed project, which uses hip hop and rap as tools in relating to the target group. If somebody gets a career as rapper, it's a side benefit. That's secondary."[44] Another rap coach, Erkan, working at a youth club, has a similar approach: "There are a lot of things you can improve musically, and those things I also introduce regularly. But it is not my focus. My focus is on what they write. That they become more mature."[45] In other words, it is primarily the process-related identity work with the individual young rappers rather than the musical outcome itself that generally is the main focus of the rap coaches I have spoken with.

However, at the same time the very musical outcomes function as incentives to engage the young rappers, who often regard these as the most important motivation factor: "The youngsters are product-oriented, so it's not just about the process and the hippie pedagogy,"[46] as Joseph explains. For this reason it is in the individual participant's work on becoming a good rapper and producing what he/she regards as good tracks that the rap coaches can guide the young rappers' writing towards more positive expressions about life and society.

From an American context Murray Forman has argued that social agencies' guidance and overseeing of young rappers' lyrical productions often expose a pre-existing ideological framework as well as parameters of language and content promoting respectfulness, non-antagonism, positivity/a positive life style and absence of (at least brutish) profanity. In doing so, they not only establish alternatives to prevailing themes in commercial and underground rap music. As role models, the rap coaches – or what Forman refers to as "'Hood workers" – clearly advocate what is often referred to as "conscious rap", hereby also, as he argues, more or less explicitly imposing genre rules.[47] This point can also be applied to the Danish context. With reference to values of authenticity and being "real" inherent to conscious rap, coaching is often focused on developing themes in the texts that emphasize personal narratives trying to tone down some of the overt clichés associated with more radical forms of

43 For a socio-linguistic study of the linguistic practises in rap music coaching, see Andreas Stæhr and Lian Malai Madsen, "Standard language in urban rap – Social media, linguistic practice and ethnographic context," in *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies, Paper 94* (Tilburg: Tilburg University, 2014).

44 Joseph, interviewed by author, June 14, 2012.

45 Erkan, interviewed by author, June 27, 2013.

46 Joseph, interviewed by author, June 14, 2012.

47 Forman, "'Hood Work: Hip-Hop, Youth Advocacy, and Model Citizenry," 253-254.

rap music, such as gangster-rap. The rap coach Joseph, has for instance described, how he always more or less implicitly works to affect the young rappers' focus on what he calls the "positive life story", in which participants express where they come from, and then hopefully get better at finding their path forward.[48] Furthermore, he hopes to be able to positively "brand being a Dane," and to promote the "values of democracy". "These are some of the values I try to pass on, through discussions about what to write about,"[49] as he puts it.

In a conversation with the rap coach Asem, who also manages a studio affiliated with a local youth club, he told me that he always asked the young rappers to send him their lyrics before they came to the studio. Referring to a correspondence he had with a young rapper, who had sent him some lyrics, he explained:

> He can't get access to the studio before he has changed this [the lyrics]. That's how I get him to think about it. […] The first thing I do is to ask, why he makes a song like this with so many nasty words. I pass it on slowly. Then he tries again, sends me a revised text where he has removed some of the nasty words, but there are still many left. Then I tell him to remove this and that and send me a revised version of the song as soon as possible. And the third time, I directly change it all, and tell him 'that's the way to do it. That's what I mean. The other stuff doesn't work.'[50]

However, when a rapper has been granted access to the studio, he often begins to come there regularly. As a young rapper coming to Asem's studio every Friday after school has explained, he uses the afternoons there to write and talk about rap songs, to record and have fun with other young rappers and Asem. During his years of frequenting the studio, this young rapper has gone from making what Asem called some "thug-life-2pac-outlaw stuff"[51] to rapping about his experiences of being a teenager in his local "'hood", about how cool a rapper he is and about how and what he feels. The last track he made was about his occasionally difficult relation to the school and how he had to pull himself together.[52]

Besides the work with writing the rap lyrics, it is very much in the social setting of the music production that the rap coaches can affect the young rappers. As the rap coach Erkan explains:

> Teaching is teaching and recording is recording. But the time you spend together is important. Because you sit in a studio together and it's maybe only a tenth of the time that you actually record something. The rest of the time you talk and then a lot of stories come up, and you can't avoid drawing some ethical points.[53]

48 Joseph, interviewed by author, June 14, 2012.
49 Joseph, interviewed by author, June 14, 2012.
50 Asem, interviewed by author, February 1, 2013.
51 Asem, Facebook message to author, December 9, 2013.
52 Anonymous under-age rapper, interviewed by author, February 1, 2013.
53 Erkan, interviewed by author, June 27, 2013.

The rap coach Ali has explained that when he interacts socially with the young rappers and takes part in the guidance process of picking a theme for the rap song and assisting in the actual writing and recording process, he conducts what he refers to as a "mainstreaming process"[54] through which he introduces the young rapper to certain values and ideas that are slowly internalized as mainstream.

In the "mainstreaming process" aimed at the young participants, the status of the coaches as rappers and musicians, recognized in the local communities, is essential. As Ali puts it, it provides "respect and justification"[55] for making demands that can push the young rappers forward.[56] However, in order to maintain this status as musical role models (with only indirect moral guidance) there is a delicate balance between the controlling and regulating aspects on the one hand, and meeting the participants at eyelevel on the other. The rap coach Erkan has for instance considered whether it is a disadvantage that all the young rappers know that he does not allow the recording of songs with violent content – since this might have the consequence that some youngsters would not attend.[57] Furthermore, the project manager, Amir, has explained how he is very aware of the fact that he "can't just censor," as he puts it. He continues:

> […] but you can say 'I really think it's stupid, when you write that you want to stick a knife in his head. That's not cool at all.' You can say that to people. That's the way to guide and supervise, until they understand what it means […] Tell them how things are done in the music business, what it is that makes one rap song a hit and not another – and in this sense use the music business and the music as the pedagogical common denominator. Instead of just saying 'you just can't do that.'[58]

Rappers as mouthpieces

According to my field observations the regulations and the limitations of what is acceptable to express in the rap songs produced in the context of the rap projects are relative depending on the specific context and situation – and on the specific rap coach. However, generally speaking, the young rappers are urged to be "real" in their songs. As a young rapper who has participated in several projects has explained:

54 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.
55 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.
56 Furthermore, several rap coaches have stressed that an ethnic minority background is also an important factor in relating to ethnic minority youngsters.
57 Erkan, interviewed by author, June 27, 2013.
58 Amir, interviewed by author, June 7, 2012; One might object that Amir's use of the standards of the music business as a regulator of the musical outcomes (which is quite a common strategy among the rap coaches) evades the fact that until recently one of the few ethnic minority rapper's who were signed by an established Danish record company (Tabu Records), was Marwan, whose debut album came out under the name *P.E.R.K.E.R.* – a strategic branding of Marwan as a stereotypical outlaw "gangster-*perker.*" So even though the reference to standards of the music business might diminish for instance pronounced incitements to violence, the tough "gangster-*perker*" brand is not without value in the music business.

> I have always been taught that you cannot lie in your songs. You can't do that. I have learned that from day one. For instance I can't rap about having expensive cars and lots of money – or about being a tough gangster from the ghetto. […] When people begin to rap, they often lie, but they learn from it. Many think that it's all about money, pussy, marihuana etc. But that's not what it's about. […] It's about rhythm and poetry.[59]

In order to change the image of a rapper from being something associated with a tough gangster to being what the rap coach Ali refers to as an "everyday politician",[60] arguments about the typical hip hop authenticity discourse of being "real" and always telling the truth as well as rap music's "inherent critique towards society,"[61] as Ali puts it, are brought into play. Hereby, the young rappers are ascribed the roles of mouthpieces for the people they identify with, which entails a responsibility to reflect constructively upon society. In this sense, as Imani Perry suggests: "Being "real" is a call to authenticity that becomes a political act."[62]

On public releases from the respective social projects it seems especially important that the rappers are represented as positive mouthpieces. A young rapper, who has contributed with several songs to albums released by a social project, has explained that he was "told not to make songs that could incite others to do something stupid. The things I wouldn't do myself I shouldn't rap about – at least not on the albums." [63]

There can be several motives for such exclusion of deviant voices from albums publicly released by social projects. Joseph, the manager of a project releasing several albums with nationwide distribution, has explained why he finds a curatorial approach to the lyrical content to be appropriate:

> If we make an album financed by the municipality or something, it has to be within the scope of certain things. I explain that to them [the participants]. And then I try to make them understand, that there is no need to depict something that is not real. If it's true, that for instance you have seen a robbery or something, then it's permitted to tell that story. But you have a responsibility towards those listening to your music and towards your little brothers and the next generation, who don't know and who can't distinguish between, whether the story is a lie, or bragging or something real.[64]

For Joseph the exclusion of deviant voices is substantiated by socioeconomically based arguments about responsibility for the younger generation. Hereby, he emphasizes that an important strategy in the use of rap music as a social resource is also the musical mediation of the positive life story to a broader audience.

59 Anonymous under-age rapper, interviewed by author, June 18, 2012.
60 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.
61 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.
62 Imani Perry, *Prophets of the hood: Politics and poetics in hip-hop* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 87.
63 Anonymous under-age rapper, interviewed by author, June 30, 2012.
64 Joseph, interviewed by author, June 14, 2012.

Even though, as Johnson and Cloonan argue, "incitement need not result in excitement"[65] – and that it most often is the very sound and sonority as well as the non-musical context, rather than the lyrics, that lead to arousal of different feelings[66] – Joseph's quoted argument about not adding fuel to the fire of young potentially angry boys with angry musical agencies, could seem to be a good socio-pedagogical strategy. Thus, along with the good, educative intentions, the regulation of lyrical content should also be understood in an economic context, where the musical output of the project can be regarded as a parameter of the individual project's socioeconomic success. Consequently, this regulation is also important for obtaining (further) financial support to uphold the social work with the young rappers – as well as to maintain the jobs of the rap coaches and project managers themselves (cf. the case about the "Messerschmidt Diss" and the closing of the rap school). In this context it is worth noting that besides being moral agents working for a greater socioeconomic benefit many of the coaches do this for a living. Thus, the young rappers are not only mouthpieces for their local "'hoods", but also representatives of the projects to which they are affiliated.

Well-intended education or repressive tolerance?

In the light of these observations, it seems relevant to question the agency that the participants are given as well as the well-intended acts of the rap coaches and project managers employed by the social projects. Are the young rappers actually urged to speak up with their own voices, in order to express their opinions and thoughts to an outside world? Or are the only possible subject positions offered within the context of the projects, those that picture well-reflected young people, working with themselves in order to be included in the Danish society?

As shown in one of the examples above, the rap coach Asem explicitly denies young rappers with deviant expressions access to the studio. These rappers might have been granted access elsewhere – but most likely they would have been met with questions and arguments trying to "mainstream" them into the "right direction" in order to put them on "the right track" – socioeconomically speaking. As Forman has noted, hip hop creativity is instrumentalized – engineered, mobilized, acted upon – and "integrated into a larger management technology that is structured to manifest particular kinds of citizenship."[67]

From the Swedish context, Johan Söderman has argued that apparently, there are parallels between this way of aiming to empower and provide voluntary education for marginalized young people with ethnic minority backgrounds through hip hop and rap music and the old Scandinavian non-formal education tradition of "*Folkeoplysning*" was aimed at empowering and educating the working class.[68] "*Folkeoplys-*

65 Johnson and Cloonan, *Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence*, 123.
66 Ibid. 139-140
67 Forman, "'Hood Work: Hip-Hop, Youth Advocacy, and Model Citizenry", 254.
68 Johan Söderman, "'Folkbildning' through hip-hop: how the ideals of three rappers parallel a Scandinavian educational tradition," *Music Education Research 13:2* (2011).

ning" has been supported by the Danish government since the 1920s and is still widespread in the Scandinavian countries.[69] According to Söderman the Scandinavian idea of non-formal adult education has, from its very beginning, had two sides to it. On the one hand, non-formal education has promoted the belief that people can achieve emancipation and empowerment through education. In this sense it can be considered a radical educational ideal by trying to empower people through their own engagement with an investment in education and societal debate, ultimately aiming to change society. On the other hand, Söderman argues, non-formal education has also been used to discipline people, ideally replacing the "old habits" and "bad taste" of the common people with more refined and proper habits and tastes. In this sense it can be regarded as an elitist educational ideal where people are seen as objects from a top-down perspective, and where the overall aim is about taming and disciplining the "wild" (working class) people. Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, Söderman claims that a certain degree of "symbolic violence" must be present, even when democratic ideals and intentions precondition educational concerns.[70]

In the light of Söderman's second understanding, it can also be argued that the use of rap music as a means in social work is in fact an act of repressive tolerance – a term most often associated with the influential philosopher and public intellectual of the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse. When people experience repressive tolerance, they mistakenly believe they are participating in discussions characterized by freedom of speech and an inclusive emphasis on their ideas, while in fact those same discussions actually reinforce the dominant ideology. In this sense, repressive tolerance works as a kind of societal pressure cooker, letting off just enough steam to prevent the whole pot from exploding. As such, it ensures continuation by allowing just enough challenge to the system to convince people that they live in a truly open society, while still maintaining the system's structural foundation.[71]

Besides the concrete work with the young rappers and the "mainstreaming process" that takes place here, there is, in my view, another level where repressive tolerance is conducted relating to the use of rap music in social work; a level closely connected to the usefulness – or what George Yúdice refers to as the "expediency"[72] – of rap music as a social resource.

In clarifying his notion of expediency of culture, Yúdice refers to the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the term "expediency" as something "merely political (esp. with regards to self-interest) to the neglect of what is just and right."[73] Yúdice modifies this definition into what he refers to as a "performative understanding of expediency of culture," which, in contrast to the above definition, focuses on "the strategies implied in any invocation of culture, any invention of tradition, in relation to

69 The Danish law on "*folkeoplysning*" (*Folkeoplysningsloven*) was renewed last time in 2011.

70 Söderman, "'Folkbildning' through hip-hop: how the ideals of three rappers parallel a Scandinavian educational tradition," 215.

71 Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

72 George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University, 2003).

73 Ibid., 38.

some purpose or goal."[74] Following this argument, it is possible to speak of culture as a resource, insofar as it harbors the possibilities to constitute a means to an end.[75]

The consensus about rap music and hip hop culture being expedient as a resource in the social work with young people with ethnic minority backgrounds is closely linked to the conceptions of rap music that are at the heart of integration politics – the purpose of getting the target group included in the Danish society and giving them an opportunity to be heard. As I will develop and discuss in the following, the strategies implied in invoking rap music as a resource seem to be, on the one hand, the conception of rap as something that ethnic minority youngsters almost "inherently" connect to because of the relative parallel to the African-Americans in the States[76] – and thus is a part of the culture they already live in. On the other hand, my field observations indicate that the expediency of rap music also is based on the conception of rap being much easier to learn compared to other kinds of musical expressions, and therefore appropriate in the work with the target group.

The conception of rap being "part of their culture"

> […] rap is part of their culture. They all wear the clothes; they all listen to the music. And when you are part of a culture, there will always be a lot of people dreaming about being a performer.[77]

As the rap coach Ali exemplifies in the quote above, a part of the motivation for using rap music in social work with ethnic minority youth, is the conception that rap music is already "part of their culture." This idea is, of course, not unproblematic. It is true that many of the young participating rappers, I have spoken with in my field research, have described, how they – because of the otherness they experience in their everyday life – feel a kind of relative parallel to the life of African-Americans in the United States and therefore easily can relate to the lyrics of African-American rap music. Hereby, they reinforce the myth that ethnic minorities' interest in rap music and hip hop is caused by the material and political conditions in the socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, where they live. The conception of rap as "part of their culture" is then commutable and appears "natural", but on the other hand, it also allows for a simplified reproduction of the public image of ethnic minority youngsters. In this way, it establishes hip hop as *the* youth culture and provides the grounds for its appropriation and reproduction both by the youngsters themselves and by policy makers and social workers.

The increasing economic support to people designing projects working with rap music in the field of integration politics has almost resulted in an overload of rap projects and recording studios in disadvantaged areas in Denmark. In this sense a rap-

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Jensen, "8210-cent, Perker4livet og Thug-gangsta," 39.
77 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.

as-resource industry that employs a great deal of more experienced rappers has been established, working in parallel with the commercial rap music industry. In this context, you might argue that rap music has become doubly expedient – as a resource to be mobilized in solving problems relating to social integration, empowering marginalized people and sustaining communities – and as an industry that extracts value from difference.

It might be argued then that this high concentration of rap music activities in disadvantaged areas may have the effect that young people living there come to think that this is the type of music they *can* make, and thus *do* make. Hence, the institutionalization of rap in social work and economic support of rap projects and studios in certain areas, also to a great extent contributes to reproducing the conception of rap music as "part of their culture" – both internally, in the local communities and externally, in the Danish society.

Along with this, the great supply of rap projects directed towards the inclusion of young marginalized people has, in some cases, paradoxically led to a marginalization of the young rappers participating in the social projects – partly from the general music industry and partly from other young people, who might even live in the immediate neighborhood.

Contrary to his own ideals and expectations, Joseph questions whether the project he manages actually plays a part in the inclusion or integration process of ethnic minority youngsters. As he has described, almost all the youngsters, participating in his project, are boys with ethnic minority background, all knowing each other, all living in the same blocks etc.[78] In retrospect Amir further notes how his project took another turn, than he had initially hoped for, as many of the youngsters participating instead of becoming part of the music business actually distanced themselves from the music business and, even more so, took on the role as marginalized ethnic minority rappers.[79]

Both the social and the musical isolation or marginalization of the young rappers that the two project managers refer to, can be related to the fact that workshops or classes in rap music are rarely affiliated to the public music schools (i.e. music training institutions for children and youngsters, which are very common in Denmark), but are most often, in order to meet the rappers at eye level, associated with youth clubs or work as independent social projects with their own facilities, often placed in the centre of an area with a high percentage of inhabitants with an ethnic minority background.

Obviously, the choice of not having rap classes in music schools can also be explained in terms of history, traditions, employment policies and the scope of activities carried out in this particular educational environment, which often focuses on technical skills and individual musical excellence. Economic considerations may also be involved. Contrary to music schools, which are very expensive to attend, it is much cheaper – sometimes totally or almost free – to attend youth clubs and social projects working with rap music production.

78 Joseph, interviewed by author, June 14, 2012.
79 Amir, interviewed by author, June 7, 2012.

Still, the exclusion of rap music production from more established music schools contributes to creating an unfavorable distinction between young people rapping and young people singing, playing the guitar etc., which might attribute to rap a lower aesthetic status in generalized perceptions of musical genre-hierarchies. In this perspective, rap music primarily becomes a tool to reach a socioeconomic goal, rather than an opportunity for the individual. Echoing Yúdice, rap music is thus "being invoked to solve problems that previously were the province of economy and politics."[80]

The conception of rap music as "easy to learn"

This leads me to the second conception of rap music's expediency: Because rap is thought of as easier to learn than other kinds of music, it provides a quick feeling of success for the practicing rapper, and therefore it can be regarded as especially appropriate in engaging the target group. The project manager Amir exemplifies this assumption:

> It's definitely harder to become a good guitarist than a rapper. Becoming a lyrical rapper is the easiest thing in the world. And it's a shortcut to get recognition and credit, it's a shortcut to get spotlight, and it's a shortcut to get girls, it's a shortcut to get more friends, it's a shortcut to get a social circle. That's the way I see it. In here [referring to the local neighborhood] nobody bothers spending ten years practicing.[81]

During my field research, I have experienced that this conception is widespread within the internal discourse of the project managers and rap coaches. Sometimes the idea is accentuated by arguing either that compared to other kinds of music, rap is "quite democratic, because it's easier,"[82] hereby giving everybody access to expressing themselves musically – or by pointing back to the "primordial design" of rap music, where, as Joseph puts it, "there was almost no melody. It was just some beat box or drums or something. It was the message that carried it."[83] This points to the idea that the authenticity of rap music lies in the message, not necessarily in fancy productions or how musically gifted a rapper is.

Several points can be made from this; the first one being that the idea of becoming a good rapper being easier than becoming, for instance, a good guitarist, is not provable. However, expecting that rap is an expedient and appropriate means to reach the target group because it is assumed to be "easy to learn," is in fact to create an institutionally structured musical frame, where the young people are given an opportunity to express themselves regardless of aesthetic quality.

Following this, it might be useful to question, what exactly the value of the produced musical products may be, if they are not valued as aesthetic expressions. In this

80 Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*, 25
81 Amir, interviewed by author, June 7, 2012.
82 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.
83 Joseph, interviewed by author, June 14, 2012.

context it is also worth considering whether the music is actually a mouthpiece for the young rappers and the people they identify with – at least a mouthpiece that has the potential to reach out to the local network as well as the surrounding society – or whether the musical engagement should only to be understood as a kind of "stopgap" to keep the boys off the streets.

In DeNora's argument about music's mediation of social agency she emphasizes that agency involves "the ability to possess some capacity for social action and its modes of feeling,"[84] and likewise that it involves social alertness (as opposed to "social sleep"). "To be an agent in the fullest sense, is thus to be imbued – albeit fleetingly – with forms of *aesthesia*. Feeling and sensitivity – the aesthetic dimension of social being – are action's animators,"[85] she writes. In line with this, Martin Stokes argues, that only a "good performance" – in relation to the specific cultural context – can "make a social event 'happen'."[86] Because, as he elaborates, "without these qualities, however they are conceived in a particular society, the ritual event is powerless to make the expected and desired connections and transformations."[87]

In other words, it is only if the aesthetic material is considered "good" in the specific cultural context that the consuming agent will be imbued with *aesthesia*, making the musical expression posses and mediate its capacity for social action. If that is the case, the rap coach Babak's characterization of the aesthetic dimensions in the use of rap music in social work becomes almost ironic:

> It ain't shit about the music. The important thing is – and that is also why it should be supported economically – that it gives empowerment. There might be some good musicians, there might come one or two groups out of it. However, it gives people an experience of success in life. It gives people an identity. Instead of being the psycho with the hardest punch, you can be the guy, who blows harder in the mic or the guy who has the best rhymes or the guy, who is the best beatboxer, or who can make beats or sing. Right? That gives people, who, one way or the other, are just fucking '*perkere*' another approach to life, saying that 'I'm also a rapper.' That's also why I started to rap.[88]

Elaborating on Stokes' observation it is also worth noting that in the "specific cultural context," according to the people I have talked to, what is valued as musical quality in the ethnic minority rap community differs from the aesthetic standards of the more established Danish rap scene. The rap coach Ali for instance, points out, how he finds that "Danish rap media value rappers in terms of the rhymes, whereas the [ethnic minority] rappers have other objectives such as flow and message, when they make the songs."[89] He concludes by stating that in this sense "there's race segregation in rap as

84 DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 153
85 Ibid.
86 Stokes, "Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music," 5
87 Ibid.
88 Babak, interviewed by author, July 8, 2010.
89 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010.

well."[90] This also means that even though the local network might listen to and value the musical expressions of the "best" rappers, the music produced is not listened to outside these networks – in the Danish majority society. Consequently, the metaphor of 'rap as a mouthpiece' becomes doubly hollow both in terms of repressive tolerance and because there is no actual audience (considering the rap music as 'good') 'outside of the ghettos'.[91]

In her seminal essay "Can the subaltern speak?,"[92] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that even though the subaltern may cry out in various ways, they do not speak, in the understanding of speaking as "a transaction between speaker and listener."[93] In other words what is being expressed, does not achieve the dialogic level of utterance. To some extent, the same can be said about the work of rap music in social work, in the sense that the lack of aesthetic impact outside the circles and networks where the music is produced obstructs the music's ability to become a mediator of social action and a promoter of social change. In this perspective the projects contribute to re-inscribing the subordinate position of their participants in society, while having the best of intentions in trying to promote and establish the image of a positive voice and a locus of agency.

Concluding remarks

From my point of view, it is hard to think about rap music in social work, without paying attention to the socio-political economy in which this work takes part.

It needs to be pointed out that the initiatives and efforts carried out within social rap projects are, above all, driven by philanthropic concerns – and that rap coaches and project managers, as Forman also points out, are placed in an unenviable position in working via rap music to redress social ills and revise systemic barriers to urban youth progress.[94] However, it should be kept in mind that this position is also a powerful position. In their own opinion, and due to their ideological, moral and political points of view, these rap coaches have the power to suppress people's opinions and affect the local youth from a position that is most often economically supported by the government and/or the municipality.

Furthermore, it should of course be noted that many of the youngsters participating in social projects working with rap music production do acquire a lot of positive societal tools. Many of them are inspired to write, to read, to articulate themselves (in

90 Ali, interviewed by author, December 21, 2010; Of course such experiences must be contextualised with other considerations such as quality, 'playlist-ability', general adjustment to the market etc.

91 By the end of my field research a few rappers with ethnic minority background *have* become mainstream, also among the "white" youngsters in Denmark. This 'new cultural wave' in Danish rap might indicate that the differentiation within the rap community in Denmark is slowly dissolving.

92 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

93 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Talk: Interview With the Editors," in *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (London: Routledge, 1996).

94 Forman, "'Hood Work: Hip-Hop, Youth Advocacy, and Model Citizenry", 255.

"better Danish"), to keep appointments, to handle social situations – and thus to reflect upon themselves as individual agents in society. In this way, people who comply with the rules of the projects can be empowered by the process-related work with the music. The production of rap music has the potential to educate young people and to put (some of) them on "the right track," seemingly being an expedient means to reach out for youngsters that do not engage in other after-school activities, and are at risk of being drawn into crime etc.

At the same time the music produced at these projects can be a result of many hours of hard work, and (at least the best of) it is valued not only by the boys producing it, but also by other young people from the participants' network in their local neighborhoods. Thus, positive life stories can be musically mediated to this local network.

However, when the use of rap music as a resource in social work is regarded within the frame of freedom of expression, several things obstruct the image of success. The process-oriented focus in mainstreaming the positive life story, excludes the more deviant voices. Furthermore, the conception of rap music's expediency based on ideas of its almost "inherent" association with the target group and its "easy accessibility" both suggest that the musical output has small aesthetical value. Rather, the production of rap music within these contexts works in an economy of socioeconomic transformation of the possible subject positions offered to the young marginalized people, as well as hopes to affect their public image.

The musical output, itself part of a rap-as-resource industry, may be produced and performed in order to speak for, or on behalf of, the youngsters. However, if the political intentions rest on ideas of giving the participants agency through musical expression; of music working as a mediator of social action or a mouthpiece for collective or individual voices, effectively mediating between their own life-world and the Danish majority society, the balance between the aesthetic dimensions of the musical product and the assumptions about its expediency could fruitfully be reconsidered. Put in another way: if the music based social projects "ain't shit about the music," then their expediency hints at a moral ambiguity, within which an elitist culture lurks in the background, asserting its symbolic powers in tolerantly repressing a possibly destabilising minority within society. Seen like this, it also becomes evident that the values promoted inherently by the overall political framing of the projects run counter to much of the democratic and liberating aspects within hip hop ideology.