



## Introduction

The recent emergence of queer hip-hop—or so it is called—has seemingly brought disturbance to the hip-hop world dominated by straight artists. Rappers like Mykki Blanco and Le1f have made their names known to global audiences and demonstrated in their performance a different kind of hip-hop, one that is definitely boundary-wrecking if not ground-breaking. Their lyrics are daring and eccentric to say the least, their public images and stage presentations are outlandish and aesthetically incoherent such that they can easily distort and disorient that which is considered normal and acceptable for a rapper and the position he/she typically speaks from. But this book is not about queer rappers who have been promoted by the music industry; instead, it looks at several grassroots and more community-oriented black gay rappers who have either rejected commercialisation or been left out of the conventional hip-hop scene because of their masculinity.

The ostensible promotion of queer hip-hop, a category Mykki Blanco “begrudgingly” accepted (Johansson 2013; Lynskey 2016), is often mistaken as a sign that the hip-hop community has grown “soft” on what hip-hop is about and whom it is for. Since women (e.g. Lil’ Kim) and white people (e.g. Eminem) have successfully invaded the traditionally black male centred hip-hop community, representations of hip-hop culture have become more and more diverse, except for the rap style—which has remained hard-headed, in-your-face, and never lacked the spirit of protest. But queer hip-hop cannot be said for a second as part of this diversification, for it is a niche genre external to, though not

mutually excluded from, the traditional hip-hop field. The two do not share the same audience the way male and female rappers do (or black and white rappers do), neither do they compete on the same platform. In other words, queer hip-hop is still predominantly indie music and has not truly reshuffled the rules of the hip-hop game.

Delving into its history, hip-hop culture has not been a place where gay rappers are welcomed. Starting from Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" (1979),<sup>1</sup> the first hip-hop song to ever reach Billboard Top 40, which features a line "I said he's a fairy I do suppose / Flyin' through the air in pantyhose", hip-hop has had a long history of homophobic lyricism. "The Message" (1982),<sup>2</sup> a hit single by Grandmaster Flash, had verses mocking the fag: "stickup kid sent up for an eight-year bid"; once in prison, "your manhood is took and you're a maytag / spendin' the next five years as a undercover fag". In more blatant a manner, The Beastie Boys had planned to name their debut album (1986) *Don't Be a Faggot*<sup>3</sup> and only apologised in 1999 through *Time Out New York* for the ignorance they initially wanted to voice by that album. In 1988, N.W.A. brought hip-hop to an unprecedented hype in which songs like "Gangsta Gangsta" and "Nobody Move"<sup>4</sup> glorified violence against lesbians and transgender people (e.g. "but she keep cryin' / I got a boyfriend' / bitch, stop lyin' / dumb-ass hooker ain't nothin' but a dyke"; "put the gat to his legs, all the way up his skirt / because this is one faggot that I had to hurt"). The above are barely a few drops in the bucket compared to the homophobic tongue inherent in gangsta rap: not only do gay slurs like faggot, punk, sissy frequent rap lyrics, pet phrases like "no homo" have also become genuine tokens of hip-hop culture.

Whereas homosexuality and hip-hop can relate to one another for sharing a history of political containment and struggle, they cannot be said to have been destined for mutual encounter. Even though prominent rappers such as Jay-Z and Russell Simons have voiced their support for gay rights, we barely see any out rappers, let alone in the fiercely competitive circle of hip-hop stardom. Unlike music genres (e.g. rock & roll, classic, jazz, R&B) where gay musicians have come out

<sup>1</sup>Sugar Hill.

<sup>2</sup>Sugar Hill.

<sup>3</sup>Def Jam, Columbia.

<sup>4</sup>Ruthless, Priority, EMI.

(e.g. Elton John, Ricky Martin, Frank Ocean) with their careers unscathed; hip-hop culture as a whole is still dominated by straight artists, with many claiming the non-existence of gay rappers. Though not denying the presence of gay people in the hip-hop industry, such claims are less about sexuality than about gender; for the underlying assumption here is that hip-hop is too masculine an art form for any gay man (or lesbian) to master and appreciate. In an interview with *New Music Express*, Chuck D. told that Frank Ocean's coming out would not have any significant impact on the hip-hop community because Ocean, though formerly involved in the rap crew *Odd Future*, came out as an R&B singer. Chuck states:

I commend Frank Ocean for coming out and saying it, but it's not a first because there's plenty of black male gay singers. Even when they don't admit it, you kind of know. If you heard somebody like... I don't want to say a name, because people will talk...but like somebody in the Wu-Tang Clan or something, if they came out then that would be ground-breaking. That would be totally challenging. (Levine 2012)

Though met with criticism, Chuck's comment was far from a backlash against Ocean's courageous coming out for he succinctly summarised the two rudimentary qualities of hip-hop music: (1) that it is the most masculine of all music genres (Perry 2004: 158); (2) that the rapper ought to be distinguished from the singer. Hence the avowed non-existence of gay rappers points to questions regarding the cultural origin of hip-hop music, its social and political employment, and how homosexuality is perceived in the music world prior to the emergence of hip-hop culture.

While some (e.g. Perry 2004: 119) have described hip-hop's masculinist origin as a contemporary response to the historical emasculation of slavery and the relegation that the black race was the "lady" among all races (Ferguson 2004: 57–8), recognising black men's gendered oppression in history and its reactive manifestation in hip-hop music does not render sexist/homophobic practice on the part of rappers excusable or out of sync with the rap scene. Instead, as this book aims to converse, one should question the extent to which rappers have, either personally or in performance, adopted the role of the oppressor as many have tried to justify their anti-gay sentiments through the lens of Afrocentrism and Black Nationalism. Also, due to the influence of the Black Arts Movement, which conceived blackness as solely a framework of anti-white opposition, self-dubbed nationalist rappers have opted to

define their work against Western or “white” music that comes from the European high culture and appears to be effeminate and bourgeois oriented (Ross 2000: 297).

As somewhat implied in Chuck’s comment, granted that “singing” and “musical” were codes for the male homosexual in the Anglo-Saxon queer vernacular, such words professed a homoerotic undertone distinct from their literal meanings (Hubbs 2004: 66). This has led some to accusing men skilled in singing (often R&B singers) of being unmanly, and perhaps gay (McClary 1991: 17). One example came from “Ya Strugglin”<sup>5</sup> where KRS-One uttered: “where oh where, are all the real men? / the feminine look seems to be the trend / you got eyeliner on, chillin and maxin’ / see you’re a man with a spine extraction / so what I’m askin’ is plain to see / are there any straight singers in R&B”? The verses bewail the feminisation of men in the contemporary world—a trend supposedly manifested by the performance of latent gay R&B singers. In spite of associating singing with gayness and even emasculation (as “spine extraction” infers), KRS-One also praised hip-hop as the last musical resort for real men, for it possessed all the non-effeminate qualities compared to Western music as though rap was a way, says Brand Nubian’s Lord Jamar, “to sing without singing, and, to write poetry without being a poet” (in Cheney 2005: 64).

Here singing is deemed a feminine act and the male singer viewed as having a proclivity for cross-gender behaviour. These assumptions are nevertheless contingent on the way modern homosexuality was defined prior to the LGBT movement, i.e. a clinical term deeply associated with symptoms of “gender disorder” (Foucault 1979; Sedgwick 1990). Male homosexuality, in this scenario, was initially perceived as desiring another man for the virtue of wanting to be a woman: there was no “real” same-sex desire as such but only heterosexual desire found in the wrong body. Such a belief has been purveyed in hip-hop music as seen in “Fly Away”<sup>6</sup> by Goodie MOB where member Khujo rapped: “ain’t no due process / for boys that become girls or verse vica<sup>7</sup> / field niggas control this / pin the hollow point tip on this gay rights activist”. While Khujo might have confused homosexual with transgender, his words, like those of

<sup>5</sup>From *Edutainment* (1990), Boogie Down Production, Jive/RCA Records.

<sup>6</sup>From *Still Standing* (1998), LaFace/Arista/BMG Records.

<sup>7</sup>Vice versa.

KRS-One, sought to alienate gay men from the domain of masculinity. As this book intends to unveil, rap lyrics that make constant references to bitches and hoes, punks and faggots, serve to create a hostile environment for women and gay participants in hip-hop culture.

That said, hip-hop's adherence to heterosexual masculinity has a discreet history with the bad-man stereotype in black folk culture (Perry 2004: 156), which is a role descended from slavery, and the rise of Black Nationalism, which condemned homosexuality and excluded self-identified black gays and lesbians as the genuine representatives of blackness (Cheney 2005). Such legacies have inadvertently endowed straight black men with the exclusive right to hip-hop music who then, for the sake of defending their ownership, would exclude women—though unsuccessfully—and gay people from participating in it. This defence is symptomatic of heterosexism which defines masculinity as heterosexual: “to be masculine in this discourse is to desire women and not men sexually” (Kiesling 2005: 696). In time hip-hop has come to be seen as incompatible with homosexuality not only because of black stereotypes associated with the form but also because representations of gay men in the media have been predominantly white and non-masculine. In which case, Chuck's comment on the need for a hard-core rapper to come out so as to visit a ground-breaking impact on hip-hop culture makes perfect sense: instead of asking why there are so few out rappers, one should ask whether the visible representations of gay men of colour who identify as masculine and happen to rap are left out of the representation of hip-hop and blackness.

### SPECTACLE AND THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

The history of racial liberation in America has involved profound displays of spectacle whereby black people formed marches, protests, and demonstrations as attempts to gain civil rights and be regarded as equal citizens. When these displays encountered violence and exclusion, new displays emerged, such as the Black Panther Party, with arms, ire, and riots to counteract state organised suppression of the black race. From W.E.B. Du Bois' well-fitting three-piece suit (which alludes to higher education and class, see Miller 2003: 739) to Black Panthers' black beret, black leather jacket, and gun (which symbolise the black working class), they have “used spectacle and representation to control gaze and as such bring wreck to what the larger public thought it knew about

black people” (Pough 2004: 24–5). Though some spectacles were more effective than others, there is no doubt that racial struggle in America has been a genealogy of representations by which black people mobilised themselves. As the American society progressed towards integration alongside new problems of racial inequalities, it is no surprise that black youths “involved in hip-hop find themselves yet again left with spectacle as a way to gain entry into the public sphere” (ibid.: 29–30).

However, Charise Cheney (2005) points out that whatever the style was, spectacles of black protest often prioritised the reclamation of black manhood as its primary goal and central to building a unified black race. As I discuss in Chapter 2, black representations have always been forged out of hetero-patriarchy—a moral regime inherent in the Anglo-Saxon culture and further promulgated by the Black Church as a political leverage for rights negotiation prior to desegregation. Whereas heterosexualising black America in essence pandered to the gender and sexual norms of the American society at large, there were black cultural if not separatist movements and organisations (e.g. the Black Arts Movement, the Nation of Islam) that regarded homosexuality as a “white disease” conspired to destroy the black race, and further reproached black gays and lesbians with aiding white supremacy (Kim 2005: 23–7). Insofar as any representation were to be carried out under the lingo of black, it was already generated through heterosexual imagery. Any attempt to come out as gay and black would result in the person’s forced silence, or worse, ostracization from his/her community. Spectacle is therefore not without limitations; it suffers from what Kobena Mercer (1990) calls “the burden of representation”, that is, the task of speaking for an entire black race already requires, due to the pressure of social forces both internal and external to the group, a regulation of black visibility in the public sphere.

Though talking specifically about how racism has impaired black representations in the social, the idea of being burdened by a generalised representation applies to the fact that the way blackness is historically defined *against* can deny black people individuality and agency and how this definition of blackness is reinforced through hip-hop culture, both internally and externally. Spectacle works so long as the group attempting to impact the public sphere controls the gaze (Pough 2004: 30): that is, how the group would like to be observed and have their messages understood by the public. But the moment a spectacle is co-opted by the mainstream culture, its political usefulness to radical

causes deteriorates—a process that normally involves media manipulation whereby political messages become diluted, twisted, or sensationalised so as to neutralise their effects or do a disservice to the group conducting the spectacle.

Hip-hop music, originated in part as an art of protest (i.e. Afrocentric rap) under the aegis of Black Nationalism, also carries the burden of representing a unified notion of blackness that specifies the behavioural congruence between masculinity and heterosexuality for black men. Though the recent rise of queer hip-hop has seemingly expanded the scope of hip-hop culture as a whole, a critical analysis of this phenomenon as seen in Chapter 3, especially taking into account the lyrical work of the queer rappers being promoted in the music industry, reveals how the advancement of queerness in hip-hop is mostly superficial for it has not opened the mainstream market to out LGBT rappers but rather created a niche market by signing up artists whose performance does not border on masculinity.

This strategy is exemplary of the hegemonic discourse in the music industry in that it absorbs new cultural currents in hip-hop without dramatically altering the dominant image of the rapper so that the established fan base is preserved. Rappers aiming to become mainstream must deal with the structural dilemma of the American cultural industry: i.e. while post-war Capitalism has embraced business models that sell products aimed at enhancing consumers' sense of personal difference and individuality, it has also demanded more one-dimensional product standardisation and categorisation for creating multi-layered consumer markets and, in so doing, control over dominant ideologies. This entails that hip-hop music must abide by capitalist principles and be compatible with the public's general perception of black culture in order to be successful commodities that attract the majority consumers.

Anthony Palmer (in Gladney 1995: 293) has argued that highly commercialised rap lyrics often undermine black oral traditions, for they are more concerned with humour and mockery which white audiences find entertaining than with addressing social issues that first inspired the rap style. Caught between commerce and authenticity, hip-hop's marriage to mass commoditisation is not only invested by capitalist hegemonic discourses (e.g. standardisation and mass production) but also has to maintain "a sincere and verifiable self" characteristic of street constituencies on commercial recordings; as a result of this dilemma rappers' struggle for wealth has become pivotal to rap composition and success, and one that

has to be told as a genuine component of the African American experience (Hess 2007: 9, 20–1).

To wit, the most commercially successful segment of hip-hop has been gangsta rap (a.k.a. the New School of hip-hop) whose music videos and lyricism, often replete with overt displays of sexism and homophobia, are favourably marketised by the American media and further projected onto white middle-class consumers as “exotic products” since their reality is so distant from that of the urban black poor. In this process, however, not only has media co-option transmuted hip-hop culture into images of public fascination and intrigue which then build its reputation as hyper-masculine, sexist, and homophobic, it has also enabled audiences to misinterpret rap lyrics and take them out of their original contexts.

Given that the origin of hip-hop music was influenced by disco culture, the early sound-system techniques of Jamaican music, and Puerto Rican music (i.e. “*plena* and *bomba*”, see Ogbar 2007: 40), its structural formation was not driven by any elements of hypermasculinity, much less sexism or homophobia. Besides, as Marlon B. Ross (2000) clarified, gay slurs were common in rap’s antecedent, “the dozens”, an African American custom involving verbal sparring by which two contestants exchange insults in rhymed sentences usually to defuse peer conflicts. These insults are usually sexualised, based on knowledge that comes readily from everyday life, and share ancestry with narratives dramatized by protest writers such as Richard Wright (ibid.: 299). It is therefore questioned whether the use of homophobic slurs in rap lyrics, particularly gangsta rap, can be justified by their individual contexts; and more specifically, whether media co-option and the mass commoditisation of hip-hop music are responsible for not vetoing such slurs in the first place.

In a sense, homophobic slurs are part of a learned banter and may not reflect a rapper’s genuine view about homosexuality. This is how Eminem justified his use of gay slurs in “Rap God”<sup>8</sup> for they belong to a behavioural expression long acquired in his days of rap duels. But, since Eminem had transitioned from street artist to megastar there was a dramatic shift in his performative context: whereas tolerance of sexual diversity was important to the inner-working of dozens, the commercialisation of rap music has taken sexualised epithets outside the context of the street, no longer used to resolve peer conflicts but for putting up a show.

<sup>8</sup>From *The Marshall Mathers LP 2* (2013), Shady, Aftermath, Interscope.

So even though such epithets may not have arisen from a place of hate, media co-option and commercialisation open up new channels of interpretation such that rap artists have little control over how fans should decipher their use of derogatory words. In addition, a crucial difference between the dozens and commercial rap is that, even though both contain sexualised epithets, sexuality is somewhat irrelevant in the former, whereas in the latter sexuality takes centre stage as the constant uttering of gay slurs and their acceptance by fans imply that gays and lesbians are not welcomed in hip-hop. The forceful erasure of gay rappers in the field of hip-hop in addition to the homophobia suspends the possibility of redefining rap semantics and, by extension, male subjectivity within hip-hop culture.

Hip-hop's transition from Afrocentric/nationalist hip-hop to gangsta rap bears witness to how mass commercialisation has gradually reduced hip-hop representations to homogenised hypermasculine spectacles such that sexual violence, misogyny, and homophobia have become standard components of rap lyrics—so much so that they have exceeded the hetero-patriarchal propaganda of hip-hop nationalism which infused black America with unified revolutionary claims. The transition was abrupt, the process was tumultuous, and the influence of the hip-hop revolution was profound, but so were the consequences of its sexual and gender politics. As this book reveals, the notorious cultural politics of hip-hop has meant that never in the history of music has the participation of gay musicians so outraged its music lords, citizens, and “ancestors” as have the gay rappers. Hip-hop community's reaction to gay rap is crammed with repugnance as if the former had “stolen” their holy grail—the “hip-hop beat”: not only have rappers like Brand Nubian, Eminem, DMX, and 2 Live Crew achieved fame and financial success by debasing LGBT people and women, they have also made it almost impossible for the hip-hop industry to accept and promote any out gay rappers.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF GAY (QUEER) REPRESENTATION IN HIP-HOP

Although some conscious rappers such as Macklemore & Ryan Lewis and MURS have openly supported gay rights and same-sex marriage by producing two YouTube's hit singles "Same Love"<sup>9</sup> and "Animal Instinct",<sup>10</sup> as Boy George<sup>11</sup> stated, it is not by accident that the hip-hop industry has promoted their work, since they are themselves straight. If the monopolisation of hip-hop by straight rappers and the music industry can be utilised to impose silence on gay men so as to shore up the durability of the power of the industry, and if hip-hop is deemed one of the last and most powerful weapons in constructing, safeguarding, and controlling sexuality, the ironic reverse use of hip-hop also yields the same power, if not stronger. The "queering" in hip-hop seeks entry into the mainstream culture through acceptance as much as resistance.

The quantity of literature on out rap artists was scant and discouraging at first: among the few texts such as *Queering the Popular Pitch* (2006) where queer representations in the music industry have been critically assessed there is a unanimous disinterest in the possibility of any masculine representation of queer resistance stemming from the realm of hip-hop. In other words, queer studies have yet to problematise any phenomenon that features both a discourse of homophobia predicated on masculinity and its counter discourse based also on masculinity—though this is mostly manifested through performance, not in social connotation. It is, therefore, of great importance to understand whether out gay rappers can occupy or have occupied such a counterculture that could become a loophole in heteronormativity capable of self-mockery, which is also not in the format of any institution, but a performative body where the power of heterosexual masculinity cultivates itself.

The gay and lesbian deployment of music as a protest against heteronormativity is not new to audiences. Since the onset of Stonewall Riots musicians and bands such as *the Village People* and *Queen* have marched against the oppression of gay people. And this is often implemented through the use of male falsetto and cross-dressing in music performance

<sup>9</sup>From *The Heist* (2012), Macklemore LLC ADA.

<sup>10</sup>From *The Underwood* (2004), Worldwide Massmedia/Revenge Ent.

<sup>11</sup><http://musicfeeds.com.au/news/boy-george-macklemore-wouldnt-have-the-same-impact-if-he-was-gay/>. Retrieved 14/06/2014.

so as to blend, if not effectively distort, socially prescribed gender roles. Freddie Mercury, Prince, Justin Hawkins, and Anthony Hegarty have sought to destabilise culturally imposed masculine roles via music's subtlety in voicing and textual malleability in gender re-contextualisation.

But, given such forms of queer resistance are often melancholically portrayed and relegated to the feminine, they are likely viewed as an emotional escape from, rather than a challenge to, the masculinist reality. This is not to devalue, however, the emancipatory potential of the transvestite in media, but rather, to question why orthodox queer strategies tend to avoid masculinity. The reason that homophobia has survived more than 40 years of gay and lesbian struggle is because of its reliance on, and accordance with, cultural hegemony to create new sites of consumption (for both ideas and practice) so as to claim superiority over that which is not masculine and non-heterosexual. Music is certainly one of those sites, seeing that genres such as rock'n' roll and hip-hop are culturally privileged as authentic, meaningful, and domineering because of their masculine portrayal, whereas the genres attached to femininity or gender ambiguity (e.g. "teen-pop" or "alternative" rock) are often constructed as devoid of significant meaning (Biddle and Jarman-Ivens 2007: 3) and unlikely to become prominent.

By the same token, homophobia in hip-hop survives on the dearth of out rappers, a phenomenon that has its roots in gay men's lack of participation in traditionally masculinised sites of sociopolitical discourse which should, in turn, remind queer scholars of the salience of gay masculine representations in the larger polity. By stretching the limits of gender conventions, gay men should not only represent what straight men are *not*, but also what they *are* ("capable of"). If straight men can no longer claim special rights and privileges based on their unique responsibilities and contributions, they will never be able to justify their power and dominance (Gerson, in Stein 2005: 605–6). And if homophobia is ultimately sustained by heterosexual men's authority to interpret masculinity the way they see it, to initiate a counter discourse capable of eradicating homophobia one must look into the sites of cultural conflict over masculinity between gay men and straight men so as to problematise masculinity anew in theory and practice.

## BLACK GAY MEN WHO RAP: THE IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING

Though sexuality sets gay rappers apart from dominant straight rappers, both see the hip-hop community as their primary frame of reference. As out rapper Sonny Lewis maintains, hip-hop is first and foremost a community; “it celebrates Me and We, as opposed to You” (Perry 2004: 89). Whereas Me refers to the MC/Rapper and We those “seduced” by Me’s rhymes and words, You, that is, the Other, designates different groups of people for straight and gay rappers. In mainstream hip-hop, the Other can be an artistic rival, white people, a sympathetic opposite, or incidents of social injustice; whereas in gay rap the Other refers to homophobic rappers, religious fundamentalists, anti-gay lawmakers, and at times closeted gay men. Both constellations make an exception for expressions that lament the loss of loved ones or failed relationships, but in lamenting they must always rise above such narratives so as to claim power and advantage in the present confrontation of Me and You. Thus, although straight and gay rappers may have different “opponents”, in being Me they all attempt to assert power and authority in hip-hop which then can be used as a social intervention in society at large.

Based on the above, the role of the rapper, gay or straight, is seen as deriving from the Afro-American marginalist tradition, one that “encompasses a highly individualistic rebellion of Afro-Americans who are marginal to, or exist on the edges of, Afro-American culture and see little use in assimilating into the American mainstream” (West, in Perry 2004: 103). In forming a marginalist position, rappers rely on local knowledge to “construct” rap music, i.e. a process of storytelling which highlights personal struggles, experiences of oppression, and the ability to survive hardships. Such a realist approach, with a strong emphasis on time and space, places the self and its recreation at the centre of the hip-hop game.

In most cases, as Gwendolyn D. Pough (2004: 101) and Mickey Hess (2007: 9, 14) noted, storytelling is integral to changing the negative images and stereotypes that dictate black people’s lives while turning a disadvantage into entertainment or empowerment. To achieve such turning effects, however, as Perry argues (2004: 91), stories featured in hip-hop music are often told in epic or comic terms like those told in black folk literature. The 1973 album *Hustler’s Convention*,<sup>12</sup> for instance,

<sup>12</sup>Music of Life (records).

having combined “poetry, jazz, funk, and “toasts” to narrate the adventures of fictional hustlers Spoon and Sport”, has profoundly shaped the upcoming rap content and the style of storytelling (Hess 2007: 6).

Because rap lyrics are likely story-laden and focus on the rapper him/herself, it seems apposite to take a biographical approach to analysing rap songs. This entails that one ought to have a grasp of rappers’ life stories and further identify particular experiences (e.g. the high, low, and turning points of their lives) that have attributed to the composition and dramatisation of their music. Notably, coming out is usually the point where music and individual stories connect; most rappers studied in this book have written songs in reference to coming out at the beginning of their careers, which also served as prototypes on which future songs are built.

Since events like coming out are both personal and political, gay rap music adheres, in one way or another, to the feminist idiom that “the personal is political” (Hanisch 1970). Inasmuch as gay rap parries the homophobic rhetoric of commercial rap, it also addresses the personal issues gay people face on a daily basis which nonetheless demand political rather than personal solutions. While problems like parental rejection, bullying, HIV/AIDS, and closeted gay men living a double life are experienced individually and often dealt with privately, they are symptoms of the heteronormative society whose pending collapse demands collective actions. Given rappers in this book have either directly or indirectly experienced some of these problems, investigating their experiences with heteronormativity and institutionalised homophobia help understand the way they have responded to such problems in rap music and shed light on the directions they hope to take to solve these problems.

Then again, due to the scarcity of out rappers and the inveterate belief that hip-hop is incompatible with homosexuality, it is difficult to determine the extent to which gay people as audiences are interested in hip-hop. Likewise, just because a rap song is about gay people does not mean they will listen to it; on the other hand, just because a rapper is homophobic does not mean that he/she will not have gay fans. In other words, gay rappers must generate themes of counter-heteronormative songs without knowing whom their audiences would be. This makes analysing gay rap songs very different from their straight counterparts as there does not exist a coherent and discernible homonormative context wherein rappers could find themselves. In which case, rappers’ biographies are the primary context from which rap lyrics derive.

All the above has set the basic tone of the book, which is to look at how a selected number of out black rappers and their music can conjure a new kind of resistance by turning masculinity against itself—that is, a form of homosexual masculinity devoid of the feminine Other. Because music genres (country, rock, R&B, etc.) are not homogenous in structure or content, raising gay/queer consciousness through different genres means to engage their listeners in different narratives of desire, and to experience (or fantasise) different kinds of community therefrom (Frith 1987: 98). By focusing on hip-hop music, this book raises questions of music identity and audience, and the specific social implications that gay hip-hop attempts to carry out—not only to the American society as a whole but to the black community in particular.

Given that hip-hop has remained a “specialised” arena of African American studies, its social significance is often confined to deconstructing racism and black manhood. Articles and literature on hip-hop<sup>13</sup> have, to varying degrees, criticised the homophobic content of many rap songs, yet they have rarely attended to the emergence of out rappers. The negligence raises suspicion as to whether the black academia is loath to claim a history of homosexuality for the black community. Indeed, any discourse, be it academic or mundane, that upholds gay-effacing or gay-apatetic views would tacitly grant the heterosexual majority “the exclusive privilege to interpret itself as society” (Hubbs 2004: 5), which, in turn, asserts its power to make life-decisions for gay people, regardless of colour.

While the global gay and lesbian movement has pushed human rights to an unparalleled level where they have redefined institutional orders in the family, marriage, workplace, and religion, it is one thing to have homosexuality legalised and quite another to have it culturally sanctioned. In other words, it is one thing to obtain equal rights but quite another to provide spaces and opportunities for gay people to flourish as they see themselves. Studies that reduce the historical complexity of homosexuality to an ephemeral rights discourse have little value in terms of providing a body of knowledge through which gay people in general can achieve a sense of heritage and future. It is owing to the above discussion and keen observation of that this book was germinated and slowly grew into fruition.

<sup>13</sup>See Bruce and Davis (2000), LaBoskey (2001), Richardson and Scott (2002), Sullivan (2003), Butler (2004), Murray (2004), Cheney (2005), White (2006), Adams and Fuller (2006), Collins (2006), Ogbay (2007), Richardson (2007), Balaji (2009), Oware (2011), etc.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, Terri M., and Douglas B. Fuller. "The Words Have Changed but the Ideology Remains the Same: Misogynistic Lyrics in Rap Music." *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 6, 2006: pp. 938–957.
- Balaji, Murali. "Owning Black Masculinity: The Intersection of Cultural Commodification and Self-Construction in Rap Music Videos." *Communicate, Culture and Critique*, Vol. 2, 2009: pp. 21–38.
- Biddle, Ian, and Freya Jarman-Ivens. "Introduction: Oh Boy! Making Masculinity in Popular Music." In *Oh Boy! Masculinities and Popular Music*, by Freya Jarman-Ivens (ed.), 1–20. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Bruce, Heather E., and Bryan Dexter Davis. "Slam: Hip-Hop Meets Poetry—A Strategy for Violence Intervention." *The English Journal*, Vol. 89, No. 5, 2000: pp. 119–127.
- Butler, Paul. "Much Respect: Toward a Hip Hop Theory of Punishment." *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 56, No. 5, 2004: pp. 983–1016.
- Cheney, Charise L. *Brothers Gonna Work It Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.
- Ferguson, Roderick A. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Colour Critique*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, the Will to Knowledge (Translated by Robert Hurley)*. London: Penguin Books, 1979 (1990).
- Frith, Simon. "Words and Music: Why Do Songs Have Words?" In *Lost in Music: Culture, Style and the Musical Event*, by Avron Levine White (ed.), 77–106. London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987.
- Gladney, Marvin J. "The Black Arts Movement and Hip Hop." *African American Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1995: pp. 291–301.
- Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal Is Political." In *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*, by Shulamith Firestone, and Anne Koedt (eds.). New York: Radical Feminism, 1970.
- Hess, Mickey. *Is Hip Hop Dead? The Past, the Present, and the Future of America's Most Wanted Music*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007.
- Hubbs, Nadine. *Queer composition of America's Sound*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Johansson, Moa. *Werkin' Girls—A Critical Viewing of Femininity Construction in Contemporary Rap*. Unpublished Thesis, Södertörn University, 2013.
- Kiesling, Scott Fabius. "Homosocial Desire in Men's Talk: Balancing and Re-creating Cultural Discourses of Masculinity." *Language in Society*, Vol. 34, No. 5, 2005: pp. 695–726.
- Kim, Daniel Y. *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- LaBoskey, Sara. "Getting Off: Portrayals in Hip Hop Dance in Film." *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2, Social and Popular Dance, 2001: pp. 112–120.

- Levine, Nick. "Chuck D: 'Ocean's Sexuality Statement Is No Hip-Hop First'." In *NME* (July 7, 2012). From <https://www.nme.com/news/music/frank-ocean-118-1269812#YGim0isJJ3rvgdLL99>. Retrieved 17/06/2014.
- Lynskey, Dorian. "Mykki Blanco: 'I Didn't Want to Be a Rapper. I Wanted to be Yoko Ono.'" In *The Guardian* (September 15, 2016). From <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/15/mykki-blanco-i-didnt-want-to-be-a-rapper-i-wanted-to-be-yoko-ono>. Retrieved 09/07/2017.
- McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Black Art and the Burden of Representation." *Third Text*, Vol. 4, No. 10, 1990: pp. 61–78.
- Miller, Monica L. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Dandy as Diasporic Race Man." *Callaloo*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2003: pp. 738–765.
- Murray, Derel Conrad. "Hip Hop vs. High Art: Notes on Rap as Spectacle." *Art Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2004: pp. 4–19.
- Ogbar, Jeffery Ogbonna Green. *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007.
- Oware, Matthew. "Brotherly Love: Homosociality and Black Masculinity in Gangsta Rap Music." *Journal of African American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2011: pp. 22–39.
- Perry, Imani. *Prophets of the Hood*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Pough, Gwendolyn D. *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.
- Richardson, Jeanita W., and Kim A. Scott. "Rap Music and Its Violent Progeny: America's Culture of Violence in Context." *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 71, No. 3, Juvenile Justice: Children of Colour in the United States, 2002: pp. 175–192.
- Richardson, Riché. *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2007.
- Ross, Marlon B. "Camping the Dirty Dozens: The Queer Resources of Black Nationalist Invective. In Plum Nelly: New Essays in Black Queer Studies." *Callaloo*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2000: pp. 290–312.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Stein, Arlene. "Make Room for Daddy: Anxious Masculinity and Emergent Homophobias in Neopatriarchal Politics." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 5, 2005: pp. 601–620.
- Sullivan, Rachel E. "Rap and Race: It's Got a Nice Beat, but What About the Message?" *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 5, 2003: pp. 605–622.
- Whiteley, Sheila, and Jennifer Rycenga (eds.). *Queering the Popular Pitch*. Routledge, 2006.