

# LOCAL NOISE

## **The DIY Habitus of Australian Hip-hop: Embodied Histories, Community and Scene**

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### **Summary:**

*If habitus is regarded as 'deep seated generative principles of thought, perception, appreciation, and action', this 'fit' seems eminently applicable to the 'embodied history' of hip-hop subcultures and the expression of their 'objectified history' in practices such as recording, performing, internet interaction, music journalism, and independent radio and television broadcasting.*

This paper, originally published in *Media International Australia*, looks at the Australian hip-hop culture in terms of its do-it-yourself ethos, which is, in part, a result of a lack of support from the commercial record labels. Tony Mitchell here discusses the artists, groups and independent labels that have championed this DIY ethos and have built a community of practice outside the mainstream industry.

### **About:**

Local Noise is an ARC-funded research project from the University of Technology, Sydney. Its focus is on Australian hip-hop, and the localisation of hip-hop in different cultural, societal and educational contexts.

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## Introduction: 'Keeping it Real': Hilltop Hoods vs Koolism

In 2006 Australian hip-hop group the Hilltop Hoods' album *The Hard Road* went straight to number one in the Australian Recording Industry (ARIA) Charts – the first time a local hip-hop group had achieved such a feat. ARIA was consequently embarrassed by the fact they had no link to the Hoods' Melbourne-based independent label Obese, who were 'off the radar' as far as conventional Australian music and recording industry infrastructures were concerned. The Hilltop Hoods went on to win two ARIA Awards in October 2006 for Best Urban Release and Best Independent Release, following on from Canberra duo Koolism who won Best Urban Release in 2004. But unlike the Hilltop Hoods, whose highly successful recordings of what is largely pub-oriented 'party rap' tend to stress the fact that they, both as individuals and a group, have been persevering in the field of Australian hip-hop for more than ten years – as their album title indicates – Koolism, operating in a far more collective spirit, had promptly dedicated their award to 'the whole Australian Hip-hop Community ... and all the Australians who "keep it real" for want of a better phrase. Be yourself. Enough of that American wannabe trash' (in Arthur 2006). This indicated that Koolism found it more important to identify themselves as representatives of a community which operated outside of the parameters of both commercial US hip-hop and the mainstream Australian music industry. Koolism's remark drew criticism from a representative of Sony Music, who were at the time attempting to manufacture an Australian equivalent of US white rapper Eminem, a US-accented Sydney-based MC called Figgkidd, whose performances and recordings tended to evoke scorn and derision from the more 'hard core' members of the Australian hip-hop community, and whose career appeared to be doomed from the start, occasioning Sony's unsuccessful re-release of his debut album *What is Figgkidd?* in 2005.

The majority Australian hip-hop continues to be fundamentally a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) subcultural field which has little or no mainstream music industry input or support (see Mitchell 2003). Like most independent music scenes, it relies on an ethic and aesthetic of what in hip-hop parlance is usually referred to as 'keeping it real', and what in popular music academic parlance is usually referred to as authenticity (eg. Gilroy 1991). Arguably both are highly overused, frequently misused and increasingly clichéd concepts that nonetheless remain sufficiently widely circulated to be standardised. As Holly Kruse indicates in her study of independent music scenes in the USA, *Site and Sound*: 'In the personal narratives of indie music scene participants ... institutions and practices ... are viewed as more "authentic" than those associated with the mainstream music industry' (2003:5). To demonstrate that this marker of authenticity operates across a wide range of music genres apart from 'indie' rock and pop, Kruse quotes a comment by Joli Jensen from her book *The Nashville Sound*: 'country music uses authenticity as a generic marker, a way to define itself as both separate and worthy' (Ibid.). Given that advocates of the independent, alternative country music scene generated in locations such as Austin, Texas or on the fringes of Nashville would no doubt regard the Nashville country music scene as a major site of mainstream inauthenticity, this demonstrates the widely shifting, locally specified significations of notions of authenticity. Koolism's invocation of 'keeping it real', on the other hand, derives from a widely used concept predominantly invoked in global hip-hop circles.<sup>1</sup>

This paper profiles some of the small labels, producers and hip-hop clothing manufacturers in Australian hip-hop such as Elefant Traks, Obese, Nuff Said, Crookneck, Invada, Grindin' and others, and examines how they have formed from the ground up – making use of local hip-hop magazines such as *Vapors*, *Out4Fame*, and *Stealth*, community radio stations such as 2SER, PBS, 3RRR, 4ZZZ, community television programs such as the *Heavyweight* hip-hop show in Melbourne, and websites such as *Ozhiphop.com* to promote their music, artwork and clothes, as well as organizing their own gigs and tours, and in the case of Obese and Nuff Said, their own record and clothing retail outlets. These local practices, which include self-produced CDs and mp3s, as well as, increasingly, postings with videoclips and audio tracks on MySpace and YouTube, share affinities with the US 'local and regional indie scenes' Kruse characterizes as

*abound[ing] with lowbudget fanzines that help create identities for unknowns, independent record stores that stock indie label releases, relatively free-formatted college and/or community radio stations, live performance venues, and artists who put out music with the help of independent record labels or on their own (2003:5).*

The Australian hip-hop scene has historically since its origins in the mid 1980s been influenced by a wide range of predominantly ‘underground’ US hip-hop practitioners, networks and communities, as well as similar scenes in the UK and elsewhere, but as Koolism indicate, increasingly tends to distance itself from any direct US influence, instead projecting a distinctively local hip-hop subculture with strongly-defined Australian characteristics.

Australian MCs are sometimes categorized as ‘ockers’, ‘falafels’ and ‘wogs’, as George Stavrias has noted out in his 2003 study of aspects of Aboriginal hip-hop in Sydney and Melbourne (Stavrias 2003:25). ‘Ocker’ hip-hop is mainly Anglo-Australian, insists on using broad Australian accents, with frequent swearing and recourse to Australian slang, decries MCs who rap with an American accent as ‘wack’ (ridiculous) and often celebrates aspects of Anglo-Australian working class culture like barbecues, sport and pubs. Prominent exponents include the Hilltop Hoods, Melbourne’s Reason, Brisbane’s Lazy Grey and Perth-based ‘femcee’ Layla. (Another sub-genre known as ‘beer hop’ is sometimes invoked, and would include groups such as the Sydney-based, comedy-inflected Two Up, who celebrate sport, RSL clubs and the like.) ‘Falafels’ is the colloquial term for ‘conscious’ rappers who generally express a left-wing or anti-government perspective in their lyrics, and are sometimes characterized as ‘hippies’ in their espousal of a critical, oppositional and even intellectual view of Australian political issues such as the treatment of Aborigines and refugees and involvement in the war in Iraq. Sydney group The Herd is perhaps the most distinctive example of this sub-genre, along with Melbourne-based ecological hip-hop sound system Combat Wombat (see St.John 2006). ‘Wog’ rap refers to MCs of non-Anglo descent, mobilising a reverse identification with the discriminatory term ‘wog’ which arose after the stand-up comedy show *Wogs Out of Work* became widely successful throughout Australia in 1989. Prominent practitioners would include Lebanese-Australian MC Sleek the Elite, multicultural Melbourne crew Curse ov Dialect, and TZU, fronted by Eurasian MC Joelistics, as well as Koolism and Perth crew Downsyde. The Sydney-based group Foreign Heights, a collusion between Fijian-Australian femcee Trey and Turkish-Mexican-Australian femcee Maya Jupiter, Tanzanian MC and producer Mr Zux and Austrian-Australian DJ Nick Toth, might be regarded as epitomising this particular subgroup. Some groups and individuals, such as pioneering Sydney crews Def Wish Cast and Brethren – who are also exponents of a Christian ethos – overlap these categories, all of which tend to espouse locally-defined but slightly differing notions of ‘keeping it real’. As Damien Arthur has argued in relation to hip-hop clothing and fashion, ‘symbolic representation within Australian hip-hop culture takes the form of consumption of brands congruent with the values of authenticity and self-expression at the core of the Australian hip-hop culture ’ (2006:153).

### **Hip-hop, Fields and Habitus**

Elaborating on Kruse’s use of the term ‘situated practices’ in independent rock music, which refers to Bourdieu’s ‘fields of practice’ and ‘habitus’, I will examine some of the subcultural networks and associations that have emerged in Australian hip-hop among independent radio stations, record labels, websites, clothing manufacturers and retail outlets, mediated through a nexus of genre, gender, space, locality, and ethnicity. Arguably all of Bourdieu’s fields of practice – economic, political, educational and cultural – are applicable to hip-hop as a discursive vernacular form of expression which has its own economic infrastructure, makes incursions into political debates and discourses, is used as a pedagogical activity in many contexts such as school and community centre skills workshops as well as having its own self-contained educational tropes, and provides its own subcultural practices in the forms of MCing, DJing, breakdancing and graffiti. But in referring to Bourdieu’s notions of ‘the field’ and ‘habitus’, Kruse is unclear about their applications to indie music scenes, using Bourdieu’s example of the relationship

between writers and the publishing industry in a way which is inappropriate to the frequently self-managed, DIY nature of the infrastructures of much independent rock music (2003:151). Kruse also neglects to offer any comprehensive definition of 'habitus' beyond Bourdieu's rather tautological reference to 'structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (2003:150); nonetheless I believe that the concept is usefully applicable to hip-hop communities in ways which have yet to be drawn on.

As John H. Scahill has pointed out in his study of habitus in education, the term originates from the Latin word meaning 'condition (of the body); character, quality: style of dress, attire, disposition, state of feeling; habit', all of which meanings can be encrypted in Bourdieu's use of the term, with the possible exception of 'character'. Scahill argues that habitus refers to socially acquired, culturally conditioned propensities 'manifested in outlooks, opinions, and embodied phenomena such as deportment, posture, ways of walking, sitting, spitting, blowing the nose, and so forth'. This may take us a long way from embodied musical and subcultural practices such as hip-hop, but it is plausible that since globally hip-hop has, in Mark Schwartz's words, 'been customized, souped up or retrofitted into local relevance' (1992:362), it has generated a geosocial, subcultural domain or field in which certain locally manifested modes of creative behaviour, interaction, social practice and performance define participants as part of a community or scene. Scahill argues further:

*Habitus, a durable but transposable system of socially acquired dispositions, functions practically as the generative source of a universal capacity such that agents act inventively when they encounter conditions identical or analogous to those producing the habitus in the first place. Capacities to 'size up' a social situation and produce an appropriate innovation such as a salutation, joke, bluff, insult, which appears the product of unfettered self-direction and individual purpose, derive from a particular habitus.*

If hip-hop can be regarded as a habitus in terms of everyday lived experience, as well as a field in terms of its status as a subcultural industry, then its various embodied practices such as freestyling (improvising rhymes), ciphering (freestyling in a circle), battling (rap competitions), beatboxing (producing percussive sounds with the breath), rapping, scratch DJing, graffiti writing, breakdancing, as well as performative forms of greeting and social interaction can all be seen as modes of behaviour arising from this habitus. Scahill defines habitus as 'at one and the same time a "deep structural" open-ended capacity for generating actions (analogous to Chomsky's generative grammar) and a durable system of dispositions acquired through experience'. The reference to Chomsky here is appropriate since many of the activities relating to hip-hop involve generating language in the form of rhymes, both improvised and pre-written, vocal and electronically-produced sounds, dance moves and graffiti tags, pieces and 'throw-ups'. Most of these practices can be related to Scahill's example of 'a quick witticism which comes as a surprise to the producing agent and listener alike; subsequent to its production the joke is evaluated according to the schemes of humor inscribed in the subjects' habitus'. Even if the prominent mode of behaviour in the hip-hop habitus is not necessarily humour – although witty MCing, freestyling and graffiti is often at a premium – but more related to the expression of acquired skills and their appreciation by the community, where respect is a key factor in both social and performative interaction. This could be illustrated by the first paragraph of Craig Matheson's 2006 profile of Melbourne MC and Obese label owner Pegz (Tirren Staaf) in the *Age*:

*You need patience if you're going to hang with Pegz. The head of Obese Records draws such a following in his 'hood that on the 25-metre journey from his tiny Prahran storefront to a nearby café there are handshakes, respectfully murmured acknowledgments of 'Pegz' and a nod of recognition from the postman (2006).*

Pegz is able to command considerable respect within Melbourne's inner city hip-hop scene largely due to having been a veteran of the community for fifteen years, as well as his status as an above-average MC with two solo albums. Then there is his five-year association with Obese, which is not just a record label with five employees; it has also operated as a distribution company for almost fifty releases by Australian hip-hop artists, some from as far away as Perth, a shop selling vinyl, CDs, graffiti spraypaint and hip-hop

clothing, and also runs the only vinyl record pressing plant in Australia.

Mathieson describes Pegz as 'Australia's first genuine hip-hop impresario' (2006), and he provides a prominent example of Scahill's characterisation of habitus as a strong form of agency which enables identification with and participation in a community, a neighbourhood and a collectivity:

*The habitus enables an agent's collusion within the society of which he/she is a member. [Bourdieu] calls this fit, or the sense of being 'at home' in a familiar milieu, an 'ontological complicity' between embodied history in the habitus and objectified history in institutional roles (Ibid.).*

If habitus is regarded as 'deep seated generative principles of thought, perception, appreciation, and action', this 'fit' seems eminently applicable to the 'embodied history' of hip-hop subcultures and the expression of their 'objectified history' in practices such as recording, performing, internet interaction, music journalism, and independent radio and television broadcasting.

### Diggi Down Under: A Collective Habitus

A recent example of an Australasia-wide hip-hop habitus is offered by cockney-accented UK MC Mystro, who is of African extraction, and a frequent visitor to Australia and New Zealand who has toured with veteran Brisbane crew Resin Dogs and run hip-hop workshops with disadvantaged young people in Sydney at the Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) network in Parramatta. Mystro's 2006 album *Diggi Down Under*, released on Grindin' Records, a label that is a relatively new player on the Australian hip-hop scene, operated by Central Station Records, a predominantly dance and techno record shop based in Oxford Street, Sydney, but originally established in Adelaide. The modus operandi of *Diggi Down Under* is a hip-hop tour of Australasia featuring MCs and DJs such as Mr Zux, Anecdote, Hyjak, Maya Jupiter, DJ Bonez and Macromantics from Sydney, Muphin, A Love and Phrase from Melbourne, the Hilltop Hoods and Flak of Crossbred Mongrels from Adelaide, Robby Balboa from Brisbane, and Layla, Drapht and Dazastah from Perth, along with Auckland DJ P-Money. All artists are listed on the CD cover along with their websites – predominantly on MySpace – and/or email addresses, and the album serves as a promotional tool for all of them as well as a way of contributing to a transnational network of hip-hop praxis. Released in both Australasia and Europe, the album offers a showcase of current Australasian hip-hop, and the twenty-two artists featured include four women MCs – a reasonably accurate indication of the gender balance which exists within Australian hip-hop. Under beats provided by Mr.Zux, the track 'State Cypha' incorporates raps from male MCs representing four states with Hyjak, Drapht, Muphin and Robby Balboa, along with Mystro himself, who demonstrate distinctively different styles of MCing and vocal intonation and pitch which to a certain extent provide readings of the different hip-hop habitus of each state (with Hilltop Hoods representing South Australia on the track 'Trade Secrets'). The track 'Beaches', produced by Dazastah, features three femcees from different states: Maya Jupiter, A-Love and Layla, all of whom respond playfully but forcefully to mock-propositions by Mystro to go with him to the beach ('you lookin' for a ho' in the wrong place bro'; 'you need more martinis before you see me in a bikini', etc.). The obvious but unspoken pun in the track on 'bitches' highlights the way the entire album plays with both stereotypical Australian clichés and US hip-hop clichés; other tracks are entitled 'Wizard of Oz', 'Fling Him on the Barbie' and 'Kangaroo Chick'. The album cover art features a background of sections from a map of Australia alongside Mystro wearing an akoubra hat with dangling corks attached, sitting on a donkey holding a carrot on a stick, approaching a silhouette of the Brisbane skyline. This motif continues inside the cover, with a silhouette of the Sydney skyline and harbour bridge with cockatoos flying over and a pelican foregrounded, a gloomy silhouette of a penal colony, three bikini-clad women with flowers in their hair next to a barbecue with palm trees in the background, and a boxing kangaroo with a pack of dogs next to cacti. There is also a tree frog, black cockatoos, two koalas and a kangaroo next to a tree adjacent to a pile of skulls, a wanted notice for Mystro and a vulture, and finally a caricature of Mystro in a Ned Kelly-like head mask jumping away from a snake, sporting a T shirt with the slogan 'I

Love Oz'. In 'Gotta Love It' Mystro trades urban affection and city pride with Sydney-based 2006 'Aussie Friggin' Hip-hop' competition winner MC Anecdote. Referring to London, Mystro raps: 'I'm from a city where there are many opportunities to make it/But then again there's plenty opportunities to fake it. Anecdote replies, 'I ain't suckin' up a major's arse... I'd rather stay broke and raise the bar'. In the chorus they both agree 'You gotta love it though right/You gotta love it for real'. Mystro's UK habitus combines with Anecdote's Sydney investment to espouse an independent ethos of the hip-hop lifestyle which is expressed through the love of the game and denounces 'fake' attachments to major labels. Using mobile recording technology, *Diggi Down Under* weaves a fabric of Australian hip-hop habitus, binding together key protagonists throughout five states and linking them through Mystro's faux-persona as an Australian hip-hop tourist.

In Australian hip-hop, as elsewhere, habitus is often expressed through an attachment to place through social and political engagement. One notable example is Melbourne MC Reason, who also combines his day-job as a secondary schools history teacher with his status as an MC. As he has stated:

*I think I'm able to maintain a constant level of education in everything that I do. And definitely I do enjoy doing, let's say, party tracks which are still indicative of real life, but I'd rather talk about social issues, social commentary, indigenous issues, land rights, the Australian environment, the Australian political system. It's something that I rap about and I'm also a history teacher and a humanities teacher, so I get to impart that knowledge on students in the classroom ... [My students] support me, they go out and buy my albums and come to the underage gigs and they love the fact I am able to wear two hats. I go into the classroom and work well with them, I work with my students rather than teach at them and you use those sorts of modern day approaches to teaching. And then they hear me on the mic, and I don't rap too far away from the person in the classroom. I don't have a teacher voice, I don't have a special MC voice I put on – there is a little bit of persona that comes with [being] on stage – but my variations as a person are not great (Mitchell 2004).*

Reason is able to operate in the overlapping habitus of a teacher and an MC, commanding respect in both sectors, and combining the two in an ongoing concern with Australian history, geography and political issues. He embodies the pedagogical aspects of Australian hip-hop which are a strong element of their habitus, with many Mcs and DJs facilitating workshops and passing on the skills to younger members of the community. Reason majored in Aboriginal history at university, so this also involves imparting knowledge about Australia's Aboriginal culture.

### Habitus in Aboriginal Hip-hop

While Australian hip-hop at large can be seen to have its independent infrastructures which bind it together nationally as well as regionally, these infrastructures tend to fall away when it come to Aboriginal practitioners of hip-hop (see Mitchell 2006). A number of Aboriginal Australian MCs express their habitus through their affective attachment to the land and their role in educating and facilitating workshops with Aboriginal young people, teaching them to connect with aspects of their traditional culture through hip-hop. Here the investment is not just in passing on hip-hop skills, but in using hip-hop as a conduit through which young people can access and express facets of traditional Aboriginal culture as a major part of their habitus. Former Newcastle-based crew Local Knowledge coined their name from the fact, as MC Joel Wenitong put it, 'we're about teaching all the cultural knowledge in a way that's appealing to our young fellas, trying to teach about traditional ways'. Their track Blackfellas begins with shout-outs to Aboriginal tribes from all over Australia, and their tracks express a pride in being Aboriginal that they convey to their audience through language as well as imagery and body movement – two members of the group had a background in traditional Aboriginal dance. As Wenitong has stated:

*Music, learning and teaching in our communities is ... the only form of communication – storytelling, music, dance, creative arts. All that sort of thing is the way we've communicated and passed our knowledge, and that's*

*one of the big reasons why hip-hop is huge in Aboriginal communities. There isn't one Aboriginal kid who doesn't like hip-hop because it's that oral communication that we're so used to over thousands and thousands of years (Mitchell and Keys: 2005).*

For some Aboriginal hip-hop artists, this expression of habitus also includes rapping in a number of different Aboriginal languages. As Sydney-based MC and breakdancer Munki Mark explains, his particular hip-hop habitus also involves representing fair skin Aboriginal people:

*[My track] 'Shades of Grey' ...attacks the issue of being a fair-skinned blackfella. Obviously I've got a lot of fair skin, but I'm Aboriginal blood within, and I don't really think anyone's attacked this issue before, but as someone who's done a lot of travelling around this country, let me tell you, there is a lot of fair skin blackfellas out there. The song developed because of people coming up to me at shows and saying 'thanks for being out there, thanks for representing us,' because when people think indigenous they think dark skin. So when I jump on stage with my fair skin and do my thing, they get a bit surprised, especially when I start rapping in language. ... I've done verses in Arrernte, which is Alice Springs language; a bit in Wiradjuri, Gamilaraay and Uliraay which is a more western version of Gamilaraay, out Lighting Range way. Also a few other desert languages mainly from the Northern Territory area. Yeah, I've definitely been into my languages over the years (Mitchell et al: 2005).*

Closely associated with habitus in hip-hop is the function of representation; this is a key aspect of the emplacement of hip-hop in relation to neighbourhood, locality, family and arguably also clan, tribe and race. It is possible for an MC, DJ or breakdancer to represent his or her suburb, but also to represent a community of Lebanese-Australians, as Sleek the Elite or NOMISE do in western Sydney, or a diversity of Aboriginal Australians as Local Knowledge or Munki Mark do. And within Aboriginal communities, this representation includes referring to traditional Aboriginal culture and contesting the Americanisation of hip-hop, as Munki Mark has explained:

*some of these elders do get me into the communities because they don't like the way the kids are going with the American hip-hop. I try to go in and show them, 'Na, this is the way we do it. This is aboriginal hip-hop here, we're not yo yo's, there's no yo yo here. We're not living in L.A. or New York; we're out here in the middle of the desert (Ibid.).*

*Desert rap* – to cite the title of a 1999 ABC documentary about hip-hop workshops run in Alice Springs by Morganics, Munki Mark and Brotha Black, entails a very different kind of habitus from urban hip-hop. Sydney-based Wire MC explains that for him, 'MC' does not have the usual hip-hop connotation of 'microphone chief' or 'master of ceremonies'; it means 'my cousin', emphasising the importance of family connections in Aboriginal communities. One of Wire MC's tracks is entitled 'B.L.A.C.K', which he explains stands for 'Born Long Ago Creation's Keeper', underlining hip-hop's incorporation into the 'black' of Aboriginal culture; as Wire has stated, 'Hip-hop is a part of Aboriginal culture, I think it always has been'.

Wire also refers to himself as an 'Abo-digital' MC in a way which combines modern digital music technology with traditional Aboriginal handcrafts. His capacity to rap outdoors without any technological support embodies his connection with traditional storytelling:

*'Abo-digital' has an ambiguous meaning because of the world digital. I'm Abo-digital because I'm a twenty-first century Aboriginal, I'm down with laptops and mobile phones and home entertainment. But digital also means your hands and your fingers, so I'm still putting my fingers in the dirt; I'm still using my hands to create things. So that's the ambiguity (Mitchell 2006).*

It is an ambiguity which gives hip-hop a particularly indigenised habitus, and takes DIY to a new level; Wire frequently raps a cappella without the aid of any technology such as microphones or turntables,

embodying the storytelling aspect of the form and relying simply on his voice and body to convey his message. And to Wire, hip-hop skills are a means of tapping into innate skills:

*when I do workshops, be they in the inner city or out remote places, I go to them not to teach skills but to share skills. I believe hip-hop allows us to express these skills that we are born with, everybody can talk, everybody can dance, it's just that hip-hop helps you to define your words and your rhythm. I don't MC to advance hip-hop – MC for me means My Cousin. And that's what it is for me, so when I am doing workshops it's more about letting these people know that we have the capabilities and the right to express ourselves (Ibid.).*

And while for MCs such as Wire and Munki Mark, hip-hop is an Aboriginal habitus, it is also an epistemology, an educational format, a vehicle to express anger at discrimination and marginalisation and pride in one's heritage, a way of binding indigenous communities together through dance and performance, a declamatory form of storytelling set to music, and above all a means of expressing oral history. Hip-hop's affinities with Aboriginal cultural forms make it an ideal means for youth to get in touch with their tribal identity, history and cultural background. It is also a vital means of articulating their place in today's world; as Wire has stated: 'There are ... literacy skills involved if you want to rap or write. It's also a form of education for yourself, self-knowledge'. So while there is no such genre as 'Aboriginal hip-hop', more a number of practitioners of hip-hop who happen to be Aboriginal, there is a sharp line of demarcation between Australian hip-hop and Aboriginal hip-hop in Australia. While much Australian hip-hop is concerned with foregrounding Australian characteristics such as accent and cultural references, Wire has noted that much of it excludes Aboriginality:

*As for that whole Aussie accent thing, I have a struggle going on with that one personally. Firstly, I don't talk ocker. I talk how I'm talkin'. I don't say 'g'day'. I don't say 'g'day mate'. I say, 'how you going brother.' That's what I say. As for this push for a more ocker MC, I find that a bit too tokenistic in one sense, like some of them seem to force it. But on a more personal outlook, it's like 'wait a minute. Hip-hop comes from a black background. I live in a country where it was a penal system before it was a colony, and we were told – or forced – to assimilate'. And this is just a personal thing, but I find now through hip-hop, having white boys come up to me and saying 'you know, maybe you should rap a bit more Aussie.' And I'm like 'what?! Are you trying to colonise me again dude?! Stop it. Stop it. (Ibid.)'*

For Wire and other MCs of Aboriginal extraction, there is also a more urgent reason for avoiding mainstream US hip-hop influences, especially bling bling and misogyny. And the sense of community among Aboriginal hip-hop practitioners draws on traditional forms of habitus which include a deep respect for women:

*the difference I find between Aboriginal hip-hop and white Australian hip-hop [is] we have a deep innate sense of community obligation, we are born with it, and that's why you don't hear black MC's – I can say all of the ones I've come across – using words like 'bitches', they won't diss women. Because my mum isn't a bitch, my grandma isn't a bitch, and the mother the land ain't a bitch. You know what I'm saying, that's a big dividing line (Ibid.).*

Over the fifteen year period between 1990 and 2005 Australian hip-hop has developed its own distinctively multicultural, indigenous and localized identities, accents, expressions and frames of reference which bear increasingly less relation to either the US forms of commercial rap music which dominate global music media broadcasting, or to US hip-hop in general. And in its espousal of an educational field of activity, and in some cases, a strongly politicised engagement with national social and historical issues, it has become a powerful vehicle for self expression, self-awareness and historical knowledge among Australia's youth. If hip-hop can generally be defined as a form of expressing habitus in Bourdieu's sense of the word, Australian and especially Aboriginal Australian practitioners cement that form of expression within an alternative educational historical praxis which at times overlaps with conventional educational institutions, but is firmly rooted in ordinary everyday experience as well as traditional practices.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Following Will Straw, Kruse rejects the use of the term 'community' in favour of 'scene', arguing that in sociological terms 'community' has a 'residual connotation of stability and integration' (2003:146) which is inappropriate for 'indie music scenes'. Nonetheless, given the widespread use of the term 'community' in Australian hip-hop by its participants and practitioners as well as by music writers I will retain it here. Also it is arguable that the Australian hip-hop community does retain a certain degree of stability and integration despite its shifting range of development, accumulation and diversity; a stability that is represented by national websites such as Oz.hip.hop.com and magazines such as Stealth which covers a wide range of Australian, but also US and global hip-hop. Australian hip-hop may be an 'imagined community' in the sense that Anderson uses the term, (see Maxwell 2003), but it is also a site of a complex web of integrated practices which retain a strong sense of local and national identity.

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