LOCAL NOISE

Hip-hop as dusty foot philosophy: Engaging Locality.

By Tony Mitchell & Alastair Pennycook.

Summary:

> *Dusty foot philosopher means the one that's poor, lives in poverty but lives in a dignified manner and philosophises about the universe and talks about things that well-read people talk about, but they've never read or travelled on a plane.*
>
> *- K'Naan*

This paper aims to open up an understanding of the ways in which localised hip-hop can on the one hand still be part of a global, digital world and yet at the same time have its feet and fingers in the dirt; how it can participate in the global spread of hip-hop and yet at the same time be part of the critique of those forms of global media that participate in the denigration of African and Aboriginal people; how local hip-hop can be both part of international popular culture while at the same time articulating local philosophies of global significance; both dusty-footed and philosophical.

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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.

When asked what he means by the 'dusty foot philosopher' (the title of his recent CD, which received a 2006 Juno Award for Rap Recording of the Year, and was nominated for the inaugural Polaris Music Prize), Somali-Canadian MC K'Naan explains that this is both how he sees himself and a broader image of global representation. When images of Africa are shown on charity television (the most common means by which people view Africa, he suggests),

> *[T]he camera always kind of pans to the feet, and the feet are always dusty from these kids. What they're trying to portray is a certain bias connected to their own historical reasoning, and what I saw though instead, was that that child with the dusty feet himself is not a beggar, and he's not an undignified struggler, but he's the dusty foot philosopher. He articulates more than the cameraman can imagine, at that point in his life. But he has nothing; he has no way to dream, even. He just is who he is. (K'Naan interview[1] 25/04/06)*

In his track 'For Mohamoud (Soviet)' he explains further:

> *Dusty foot philosopher means the one that's poor, lives in poverty but lives in a dignified manner and philosophises about the universe and talks about things that well-read people talk about, but they've never read or travelled on a plane. (K'Naan 2005)*

K'Naan's vision raises several key themes we wish to pursue here. By looking at hip-hop as dusty foot philosophy, as both grounded in the local and the real, and capable of articulating a broader sense of what life is about, K'Naan is not only talking about localization, about the ways in which hip-hop becomes a means for the local articulation of identity, but also about a deeper sense of locality. To have one's feet in the dust is an image of localization that goes beyond appropriation of sounds, or references to local contexts. It speaks to a particular groundedness, a relationship to the earth that is about both pleasure and politics. To walk barefoot is to be located in a particular way. In his adopted home, Canada, the impossibility of walking barefoot makes him "feel like a foreigner." By contrast, "walking on the sand with your bare feet is therapeutic, you feel the sun." (Interview). Far from being a trivial point only about the weather or sartorial politics, this is a much more significant issue to do with the ways in which our histories, bodies, desires and localities are intertwined.

Indigenous Australian Wire MC articulates this relationship in a different way, picking up the importance of the earth, dirt, and dust while simultaneously linking to a new digital era. Asked to explain what he means by his phrase *abo-digital*, Wire MC explains that it

> *has an ambiguous meaning because of the word 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. (Wire MC 31/03/06)*

This image is important for several reasons: It pulls a sense of indigeneity away from an indelible link only to traditional ways of doing things. This is a twenty-first century Aboriginal performer at home in a digital, global era. Yet at the same time, like K'Naan's dusty feet, he has dirty hands, fingers that create from the land to which Aboriginal Australians have been so deeply connected for thousands of years. Wire MC links the traditional and modern in another way, through his notion of hip-hop as 'the modern day corroboree[2]': Hip-hop brings people together in new ways, to tell stories, to sing and dance but "It's still the same corroboree, still singing and dancing and telling the same stories about the immediate environment" (Wire MC).

Both Wire MC and K'Naan articulate the complexity of cultural and political influences here: They are 21st century digital artists who draw on and change traditional, cultural forms; they are part of the global hip-hop movement, identifying with and also rejecting different aspects of its global formation; they benefit from and participate in the rapid flows of music and ideas made possible in the digital age and yet they remain highly critical of Western ways of viewing the world and of the bias in particular forms of histori-

cal reasoning. Dusty-foot philosophy is an argument to understand the impoverished of this world not as undignified strugglers but as dusty-foot philosophers, as capable of articulating more than the outside observer can imagine. This paper aims to open up an understanding of the ways in which localized hip-hop can on the one hand still be part of a global, digital world and yet at the same time have its feet and fingers in the dirt; how it can participate in the global spread of hip-hop and yet at the same time be part of the critique of those forms of global media that participate in the denigration of African and Aboriginal people; how local hip-hop can be both part of international popular culture while at the same time articulating local philosophies of global significance; both dusty-footed and philosophical. In taking up this line of argument, we are trying to get beyond common images whereby localization is merely the appropriation of the preexisting global, in order to explore instead how these artists' articulation of the *coevalness of origins* obliges us to spatialize time and think differently about the already local (cf Mignolo, 2000).

Localizations: Struggle, engagement, transformation

A central concern of this paper, therefore, is to pursue what it means for hip-hop to become localized. This has implications not only for an understanding of hip-hop but also for broader concerns in anthropology and linguistics, particularly with respect to concerns about the global spread of English. If we only have a vision of a global spread of hip-hop or English, emanating from one source before becoming localized through the adoption of various cultural or linguistic forms, we may be missing the dynamics of change, struggle and appropriation. As Robbins (2001) notes, in trying to understand the relationship between tradition and modernity, the tendency, at least among anthropologists, is to emphasize processes of localization and appropriation so that aspects of modernity become localized: "No matter what modernity is to begin with" this argument goes, "once cooked in the heat of local fires it will have lost its shape to a significant extent and become something indigenous and distinctive, a homemade product of the kind anthropologists have long studied. In this practice, keeping things culturally local implicitly becomes the only way of keeping them ethnographically real" (p.901). While it might be tempting to follow this line of thought in our approach to hip-hop localization, thus suggesting that keeping it real means keeping things culturally local (see Pennycook, 2007), we also want to develop Robbins' concern that the proposition "when local cultures cut modernity to fit their own dimensions, they can make it assume almost any form they like" (pp901-2) is problematic.

This does not imply that there is un unchangeable essence to hip-hop that resists localization; but nor does it assume that once cooked in the heat of local fires, hip-hop loses its shape to such an extent that it becomes something else. What it does suggest is that when local practices of music, dance, story-telling and painting encounter diversifying forms of globalized hip-hop, they enable a recreation both of what it means to be local and of what then counts as the global. "In these self-consciously multicultural, globalized times" suggests Robbins, "reports of cultural difference do little to disrupt our own settled understandings" (p.909). In order to come to terms with forms of linguistic and cultural localization, therefore, we need to look very carefully at current conceptualizations of the global spread of hip-hop. In the same way that accounts of the current state of English as nothing but a global spread from the centre to the periphery – whether from a triumphalist or a critical perspective (eg Phillipson, 1992) – fail to account for the many local identifications and appropriations, so it is still common to view the global spread of hip-hop as if this were only the global take-up of a particular cultural form. A recent international hip-hop conference in the German city of Chemnitz in August 2006, for example, which dealt mainly with hip-hop in Germany, as well as France, Cuba, Slovenia, Poland, Australia and the USA, was opened by the U.S. consul from Leipzig, who referred to the 'uniquely American' nature of hip-hop.

From this perspective, then, the global spread of hip-hop is the global spread of (African) American culture: "Hip-hop is and always will be a culture of the African-American minority. But it has become an international language, a style that connects and defines the self-image of countless teenagers…" (Bozza, 2003, p.130). While this perspective captures several important points – hip-hop is indeed a globally mar-

keted phenomenon, and American hip-hop is dominant, particularly in English-language media – it fails to engage with the different circuits of flow through which hip-hop circulates globally (Pennycook, 2007), the diversity of local appropriations of hip-hop, or the coevalness of origins and the roles of mimicry and enactment (what may appear very similar may not in fact be so). Thus, accusations of cultural imperialism, as with accusations of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), while important as critiques of media dominance and cultural commercialization, may ultimately fail to engage with the complexity of cultural flows and appropriations. Thus when Brown (2006: 138) in his discussion of German hip-hop refers to the "'cultural imperialism' that overwhelmed local cultures with a flood of products and ideas, erasing old traditions and replacing them with new ones" in post-war Europe due to "U.S. military and economic dominance," this critique of US media dominance falls into the trap of denying cultural agency to others. There is no doubt that US films such as *Wild Style* (1983) and *Beat Street* (1984) exerted a global influence on fledgling hip-hop cultures, as Brown acknowledges, but so too did hip-hop's origins in Jamaican DJs toasting and sound system culture in the 1960s and 1970s, a factor dealt with extensively by Toop (1984) and Hebdige (1987) in two of the first books to deal seriously with hip-hop. Thus, in the same way that a critique of English linguistic imperialism overlooks the complexity of local engagement, so arguments that simultaneously critique and celebrate African American dominance of global hip-hop media fail to develop an appreciation of the complexity of localization.

Our point is not to deny the massive influence of American, and particularly African American, hip-hop on contemporary global hip-hop, nor to overlook the diversity within hip-hop in the USA, but rather to explore what is meant by localizations of hip-hop. In his preface to the book *The Vinyl Ain't Final*, which devotes half its space to African American hip-hop scenes in the USA and half to hip-hop scenes in Hawai'i (contentiously incorporated into the U.S. section), the UK, Germany, France, Cuba, the Samoan diaspora, Japan, South Africa and Tanzania, Robin Kelley draws attention to this problem by suggesting that "In most academic circles nowadays, acknowledging that the ghettoes of North America continue to be the primary cultural referent for hip-hop around the globe will easily draw charges of 'Americocentrism'" (2006: xiv) By "uniquely embrac[ing] writings on the subject inside and outside of North America" Kelley goes on to argue, the book neither denies "the centrality of the U.S. in the culture and distribution of hip-hop culture" nor overlooks the ways in which "artists incorporate local cultural forms, language and stories that speak specifically to their experiences." The problem, however, is that even when viewed from this perspective, there is a danger that the focus on the perceived similarities between local "clothing styles, dance styles, vocal styles, even down to their stances and poses" and those of African American urban youth may obscure the differences. To assume that "the look and the sound of hip-hop around the world shares much in common with what emerged out of the States" (2006:xiv) may be not only to see similarities rather than differences but also to assume that similarity implies directionality.

An understanding of creole languages and continua may offer a useful parallel here. To categorize African American vernacular English (AAVE) as a 'sub-variety' of American English, as do some researchers in world Englishes (Kachru and Nelson, 2006) for example, or to see Aboriginal English as a 'sub-category' of Australian English, is, amongst other faults, to fall under the sway of a trickle-down model of language spread, where a language seeps from the centre into different communities, changing as it diversifies. It assumes that observed similarity is a result of non-divergence rather than re-convergence. Such a model misses entirely the far more dynamic role of pidgins and creoles, the exclusion of which from world Englishes, as Mufwene has noted, "has to do more with the racial identity of those who speak them than with how these varieties developed and the extent of their structural deviations" (2001,p.107). The serious analysis of creole development and decreolization processes (Ewers, 1996; Rickford, 1997; Mufwene, 2001) suggests by contrast that in spite of apparent similarities between AAVE and American English, the former may be better understood as a creole-based language carrying numerous elements of African languages that has been gradually gaining similarities with American English, rather than as a sub-variety of English. Similarly, Aboriginal English in Australia may have far more to do with divergence from Kriol than from

Australian English (Malcolm 2001). Apparent similarity, therefore, should not be the basis for assuming unidirectional spread. Convergence and multiple origins are equally possible. The echoes around the world of new hip-hop cultures may be understood not so much as sub-varieties of global hip-hop, but rather as local traditions being pulled towards global cultural forms while those traditions are simultaneously reinvented.

While there is therefore clearly a worthwhile critique to be made of the "bankrupt images of gangsterism and materialism" that "dominate the global airwaves," we need to understand not only the "tragic consequences as well as resistive urges" (Kelley, 2006, p xvi) of the global spread of hip-hop, but also the dynamism that underlies processes of localization. At the very least, by analogy with World Englishes, we would do better to talk of global hip-hops. Yet the processes of localization are more complex than global hip-hop taking on local flavours: While an analogy with world Englishes may bring us pluralization, the shortcomings of a vision of English with local flavours also has limitations. It is not so much the case that hip-hop merely takes on local characteristics, but rather that *it has always been local*. As Wire MC says, 'Hip-hop is a part of Aboriginal culture, I think it always has been' (Interview). This is not of course to suggest that hip-hop as a global cultural formation was invented by Indigenous Australians; rather, it is to argue that what now counts as Aboriginal hip-hop is the product of a dynamic set of identifications – with African American music, style and struggle – and a dynamic set of reidentifications – with Indigenous music, style and struggle.

Not only have indigenous clothing, dance, vocal styles, stances and movements combined with hip-hop styles to form indigenised hybrids where US hip-hop is no longer the host culture, but hip-hop is seen as having a direct link back to traditional ways of singing, dancing and telling stories. The two MCs in Australian Aboriginal crew Street Warriors, for example, both have a background in traditional Aboriginal dance which invests their stances and movements with an authority that dates back way beyond the 1970s. Similarly, Upper Hutt Posse draw on Maori traditional dances such as the *haka*, a war dance, to invest their hip-hop with indigenous culture, just as K'Naan draws on the 'handme-down poetry' of his Somalian grandfather, and Native American MC Litefoot draws on indigenous American culture. Indeed, in the case of indigenous cultures such as New Zealand Maori, Indigenous Australians, and Somalian Africans, not to mention native Americans, entrenched oral traditions of storytelling and poetry stretching back thousands of years have incorporated hip-hop into their cultures rather than the other way around. While it is evident that African American, and African French and African Brazilian influences on global hip-hop are central to its development, the question we are confronted by is this: At what point does the local take over the global, or at what point do we need to focus on the local host culture appropriating hip-hop rather than hip-hop becoming localized? And if we take Robbins' concern seriously that we need to understand the stakes over which struggles to appropriate are fought, what meanings do forms of language and culture moving in different directions come to have? Put another way, rather than trying "to sort out the autotochthonous from the borrowed, we need to consider the uses musicians make of hip-hop, how they understand its relationship to their own condition, and what new meanings are generated by its use" (Urla, 2001, p185).

The struggle for localization

As Robbins (2001) suggests, the struggle for localization is one that has to deal with the content of what is being localized. Thus Wire and K'Naan are obliged to revise the dominant narrative of Black American exclusive ownership of Hip-hop and construct themselves as artists who have an equal right to claim Hip-hop[3]. Thus, at the same time that K'Naan takes up hip-hop as a means of expression, he also engages in a rejection of certain US hip-hop styles and meanings, simultaneously critiquing the violence in Somalia and the glorification of violence in some US rap. The view of an individual and violent struggle against oppression in the ghettoes of North America he compares with the everyday realities of life in Somalia:

> *in my country, everyone is in that condition. So it's not special. So therefore we don't have an element which makes it a thing that is possibly glorifiable. And that's why, for me, what I was talking about was these are the people who don't speak about it, they live it. And when there's a gangster, quite a few of which exist in my life, who I know, they never say that they are. They don't have that mentality; it's not linked to 'cool'. In fact, it is uncool. And they know it, and that's the misfortune. (Interview, K'Naan)*

This theme is a feature of his tracks 'Hardcore,' and 'If Rap Gets Jealous', where he mocks the posturing of Gangsta Rap when set against the violence on the streets of Mogadishu, 'the most dangerous city in the universe, where people get shot at birth'. 'Hardcore's chorus, 'So what's hardcore, really? Are you hard-core? Mmmm' intersperses detail about life on the Somalian streets with a bemused questioning about the reference points and values of so-called 'hardcore' hip-hop. And in his track 'Strugglin'', he says 'I'm more gangsta than you are, but I ain't about the raw route' , which he interprets as

> *talking to the privileged mentality that is called 'keepin' it gangsta'. That's pretty suburban to me. Real gangsters don't want to keep it that way. In my view, a gangsta is the would be revolutionary, who is dying to survive, and awaits the opportunity to change (2005:2)*

Global hip-hops can thus be highly critical of dominant themes in global hip-hop of – in particular features of violence, consumerism and misogyny – especially when confronted by very different local conditions. Senegalese crew Daara J note a similar move away from American themes towards more local elements. According to Faada Freddy, the hip-hop movement in Senegal was at first just imitating certain forms of US rap, "carry a gun, go down to the streets and try to show that you are someone that you can express yourself with violence." But eventually they realised that

> *we should care more about our hunger problems….we live in a country where we have poverty, power, race …you know ethnic wars and stuff like that. So we couldn't afford to go like Americans, talking about 'Bling Bling', calling our pretty women 'Hoes' or stuff like that. So we couldn't afford that! So that's why we went out at a point where we begin to realise …you know…that rap music was about the reality and therefore we went back to our background and see that …OK…and not only rap music is a music that could help people …you know…solve their problems, but this music is ours. It is a part of our culture! (Daara J interview, 05/03/05).*

At the same time that Daara J identify with aspects of Black American hip-hop, they also resist and change parts of its message and style that they find inappropriate to their local circumstances. On the one hand there may be an identification with music, style and antiracist struggles; on the other hand, a resistance to the dominance of particular worldviews. In making this dual move to render hip-hop "part of our culture" while rejecting what are perceived as common values in US hip-hop, there is a tendency to deal only with a very particular and stereotypical image of US hip-hop, while also potentially reifying and romanticizing local cultural practices: Resistance all too often comes at the expense of simplification. Wire MC likewise rejects what he sees as the misogyny in the use of the term 'bitch' in US rap, linking this not only to his view of proper Indigenous Australian relations to women but also to an understanding of Aboriginal land as a maternal force:

> *we have a deep innate sense of community obligation, we are born with it, and that's why you don't hear Black [Aboriginal] MCs ... using words like 'bitches', they won't diss women. Because my mum isn't a bitch, my grandma isn't a bitch, and my mother the land ain't a bitch (Wire MC).*

Becoming already local

Senegalese hip-hop group Daara J also draw on many other possible influences, from theFrancophone hip-hop scene (which connects the *banlieues* of Paris and Marseille with the multilingual urban scenes of Dakar, Libreville and Montreal; see Auzanneau, 2002; Sarkar and Allen, 2007; Sarkar this volume), to other African musics and traditions. When Daara J claim that "this music is ours. It is a part of our culture," they

point not only to a level of appropriation but rather to a different form of ownership. As K'Naan argues, African hip-hop has had to draw on very limited resources, and work with minimal means, and is born out of poverty, hardship and war:

> *Hip-hop in Africa is made out of nothing, and for nothing. Hip-hop in the U.S. is made out of dreams and for everything. Hip-hop in Canada is made out of dreams and for nothing … In North America, I am introducing a culture, in Africa, I am reviving one (2005:2).*

Not only does K'Naan usefully contrast here the material and economic bases from which hip-hop emerges in the three contexts, but he also points to the issue we shall develop further in this section: While one part of his agenda is to make North Americans aware of the violence and degradations suffered by Somalians (and the concomitant shallowness of a glorification of violence), another part of his agenda is to use hip-hop to revive oral traditions in Somalia. From this point of view, then, hip-hop can be a tool not so much of cultural imperialism, nor even of cultural affiliation or appropriation, but rather of cultural revival.

K'Naan, whose name means 'the traveller', moved from Wardhiigleey (River of Blood), his 'hood in Mogadishu, to New York's Harlem and then to Toronto because 'we felt the immigration situation was more friendly in Canada' (2005:1). He taught himself to rap before he spoke a word of English while he was still living in Mogadishu, where his father, who was working as a taxi driver in Harlem, sent him new vinyl releases from New York by artists such as Rakim and Nas:

> *But seriously,*
>
> *I remember I was seven*
>
> *When rap came mysteriously*
>
> *And made me feel eleven*
>
> *It understood me*
>
> *and made my ghetto heaven*
>
> *I understood it as*
>
> *the new poor peoples' weapon*

He lists among his musical influences African artists such as Sulva, Magool, Marian Mursal, Youssou N'Dour – with whom he worked on the 2001 musicians in exile project, *Building Bridges* - as well as Salif Keita and Ali Farka Toure, and describes his style as 'an outcome of my personal experiences, travels and musical tastes. It's also born out of the struggles and beauties that I remember from our ancient culture' (2005:2). Rather than using a DJ, he prefers to perform with a band, and plays the traditional African drum the *djembe*. He also draws on the tradition of oral poetry in Somalia for inspiration, particularly Arays Isse Karshe, whom (along with his own grandfather and Pablo Neruda) he rates as one of the great poets of the world. He explains that not only did Arays Isse Karshe have his own unique rhythm and style, to which K'Naan pays homage in his track 'Until the Lion Learns to Speak', and at the beginning of his video clip to 'Strugglin', but also "everything that he talked about was concerning the struggle of the country and its power struggle with independence and colonialism." That a 21st century hip-hop artist can draw on a tradition of Somalian oral poetry draws attention to the possibility that rather than focusing centrally on processes of spread and localization, we also need to account for processes by which local traditions are changed and spread. Hip-hop makes it possible for the local to be put on a global stage, not as the dusty feet caught through the lenses of a camera intent on depicting poverty, but rather as the dusty feet that are grounded in local philosophical and poetic traditions.

As K'Naan goes on to explain, with the West African tradition of griots and the East African traditions of oral poetry, it is easy to see the connections between traditional African practices and hip-hop.

> *I'm certain that any country, any given country in Africa, you will find an ancient form of hip-hop. It's just natural for someone from Africa to recite something over a drum and to recite it in a talking blues fashion, and then it becomes this thing called hip-hop.*

As he suggests elsewhere (the dustyfoot.com, 2006), in the context of the finding of the oldest human fossils 140 miles east of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 'We are… and always have been, your forefathers'. There are several ways we can read this: It sits well with those Afrocentric arguments that draw strong connections between contemporary African American cultures and their African origins. But rather than viewing hip-hop as an American cultural form with African origins, K'Naan suggests that it is first and foremost an African form that has been Americanised. It might be tempting to dismiss such claims as fanciful when viewed against the standard histories of the development of hip-hop (eg Chang, 2005), or to see this only as a local construction for very particular purposes. We are trying in this paper, however, to take this more seriously in order to grasp the ways in which both histories are plausible once localization os dealt with in its complexities. Senegalese hip-hop group Daara J, as we have seen, claim hip-hop as their own, not merely as an act of appropriation but rather as a claim to origins. According to their track 'Boomerang' "Born in Africa, brought up in America, hip-hop has come full circle," (Boomerang). As their MC Faada Freddy explains, the traditional Senegalese form of rhythmic poetry, *tasso* is the original form of rap:

> *So that's why we arrive at the statement where the American people brought out all that culture that was slumbering at the bottom of their soul…And this is …it was the beginning of rap music. This music went around the world because …it applied a certain influence over the world and all over. But now just realise that music is coming back home because it is about time that we join the traditional music, we join yesterday to today (Daara J 05/03/05).*

In joining yesterday to today, Daara J present a different possibility from the image of hip-hop emerging from US urban ghettoes and spreading across the world, since from their point of view all such movements can be traced back to African contexts[4]. From this point of view, the arguments over the multiple influences of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993) or the Jamaican role in the development of hip-hop, become subsumed under a wider argument that all are part of the wider influence of the African diaspora. The development of hip-hop in Africa from this point of view is merely a return to its roots. Thus while Perry (2004) rightly critiques "romantic Afro-Atlanticism" (p.17) for overlooking the point that "Black Americans as a community do not consume imported music from other cultures in large numbers" and thus ultimately the "postcolonial Afro- Atlantic hip-hop community is…a fantastic aspiration rather than a reality" (p.19), this in turn may overlook the point that African American hip-hop is only a part of a much wider circuit of musical and cultural influences.

Yet Daara J's image of the boomerang also undercuts their own claim that everything started in Africa. The boomerang also brings us spinning in a circle back to Indigenous Australia and Wire MC:

> *The reason I was attracted to it was the song and dance aspect to it, because the culture I come from, The Dreamtime, we always expressed our stories, our beliefs, our fears, our superstitions through song and dance. So being an Abodigital in the 21st century, it was a natural evolution for me to move into hip-hop and continue the corroboree, but with the modern day aspect. (Wire MC)*

The point, then, is that it is not fruitful to pursue the true origins of hip-hop, as if these could be found either in the villages of Africa or the ghettoes of North America, but rather to appreciate that once hip-hop is taken up in a local context, the direction of appropriation starts to be reversed: No longer is this a cultural form that has been localized; now it is a local form that connects to several worlds: Australian

Aboriginal hip-hop does connect to African oral traditions but not as much as it connects to Australian Aboriginal practices. It is in this sense that hip-hop has always been Aboriginal Australian just as it has always been African. Hip-hop from this point of view is a continuation of Indigenous traditions; it draws people into a new relationship with cultural practices that have a history far longer than those of current popular music. Yet in doing so, it also changes those cultures and traditions, rendering them anew. From rappers in Berlin of Turkish background who draw on the traditions of medieval Turkish minstrels (*halk ozani*), acting as "contemporary minstrels, or storytellers,…the spokespersons of the Turkish diaspora" (Kaya, 2001, p.203), to Fijian Australian MC Trey's invocation of the connections between hip-hop and Pacific Islander cultures, hip-hop becomes not merely a cultural formation that has spread and been locally taken up, nor even one that has its origins in Africa and has returned, but rather one that has always been local.

Language localizations

Here, too, language plays an important role, but in more complex ways than an assumption that English implies globalization and other languages local appropriations. It is a common process for the localization of hip-hop to involve a move into other languages. Thus, from Italy to Aotearoa/ NZ, Greenland to Germany, Japan to Tanzania, hip-hop has typically been taken up in local languages (Mitchell, 2003; Pennycook, 2007). Such a move, however, is subject to the cultural politics of local language use: It is one thing to use German in Germany, but quite another to use Turkish, or as Kaya's (2001) study of Turkish hip-hop culture in Berlin suggests, a "mix of Turkish, German and American-English… a verbal celebration of ghetto multiculturalism, twisting German, Turkish and American slang in resistance to the official language" (p.147). It is something quite different again to use Maori in Aotearoa/ NZ, where it remains a minority indigenous language spoken by a relatively small proportion of the population. Rapping in Maori thus becomes a political and cultural statement about the legacy of British colonialism, especially when no English translation is provided, as in some of Te Kupu and Upper Hutt Posse's tracks. As Te Kupu has said of the Upper Hutt Posse's 1998 video clip 'Tangata Whenua' (People of the Land):

> *It's all in the Maaori language, which is our native language, the native language of Aotearoa … Tangata Whenua is indigenous people, literally 'Tangata'/person, and 'whenua'/land . … Throughout the video you will notice that there is a meeting house, a wharenui, involved there. There's carvings. What we do is carve depictions of our ancestors and they're spread throughout the video, there's constant reference to them, and that's to say that they are here with us right now. That's a Maaori belief that our ancestors are with us all the time, through wider spirituality (2000:202).*

So the track draws on traditional Maori spirituality and belief, as well as using pre-European Maori musical instruments such as the purerehua (bull roarer), to eliminate the legacy of colonialism and white settlement of Aotearoa, and return the Maori to sovereignty of the land, as well as asserting the importance of the Maori language and its belief systems. And like K'naan in his Somali language track 'Soobax'(Come out), which calls on Somalian gods to help him to gain wisdom from his experience, and find freedom through struggle, Upper Hutt Posse invoke the Maori deities to combat pollution.

K'Naan, however, uses mainly English in his music – he grew up in Canada after his family fled Somalia as refugees – but laments the paucity of the language. While it is useful for bringing awareness of Somalia to a wider audience – and thus, as he suggests, his use of English is an advantage to Somalian people rather than to him personally – English cannot compare with Somali, which

> *is entirely poetic, I mean, even if I was to speak to you in Somali just in conversation, you'd hear rhythm, and you'd hear rhyme, and most of the words I would use would have to begin in the same letter. It's just because it is set up in poetry. So, when I compare it to Somali, English is very dry, and also very young sounding. It's blatant. Whereas in Somali, if you had done something wrong, I would have to take three minutes to address the universe, and then say to you, '…this is why you've done something wrong'. (K'Naan interview)*

The struggle for K'Naan, then, is how to use English-language hip-hop on the one hand to speak to a wider world about the violence and desperation of life in Mogadishu and, on the other, to use this dry, young, blatant language to convey the richness of Somalian oral poetic tradition.

Wire MC also has to struggle with the role of English. He rejects the new colonialism that insists that he should use a particular Australian accent and verbal repertoire to represent his localization:

> *as for that whole Aussie accent thing, man, I have a struggle going on with that one personally. Firstly, I don't talk ocker[5]. 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 us. 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.' (Wire MC)*

Here again we see the double identification – "Hip-hop comes from a black background" – where it is simultaneously African American and part of local relations of racial discrimination. One way to think about this, is to take up Perry's (2004) argument that hip-hop in the US is "situationally black, that is to say that the role it occupies in our society is black both in terms of its relationship to other segments of the black community and of its relationship to the larger white segment of the country and of the 'global village'" (p.29). Thus, for many hip-hop artists around the world, there is an identification not only with aspects of the music, style and language of US hip-hop, but also with the racial politics that surround it. Yet, to be "situationally black" is also to be tied to local relations of race: For Wire MC, this is to be confronted not by the history of slavery that continues to define parts of African American identity, but by the colonial history of Australia. While there are many parallels of death, dispossession and denigration, as well as massive linguistic and cultural disruptions, there are also deep differences in terms of relation to land, language and culture.

Wire does incorporate some words of his traditional language into his hip-hop, but since he didn't grow up speaking the language, English is his dominant medium.

> *I started a crew up at home, up at Bowraville [in northern New South Wales] and the group was called Barrung Buljurr Girrawa , which in Gumbainggir is Brrung, 'Bowra', Buljurr 'Rhythm' and Girrawa 'Mob', so Bowra Rhythm Mob. … we weren't rapping in language, unless you consider English to be language. There are indigenous words that I might use in some of my raps, but I don't speak the language or practice the language, so I don't want to make any tokenistic gestures towards my Gombangi heritage through that. I'll use more modern day slang that we use up home, I'll take that and put that in the raps, and if I do that then up home they go 'oh, yeah, we know what he's talking about.' But if I say something in language a lot of people up home don't really know language so it's like 'what's he saying and why is he saying that?'*

If we do "consider English to be language" (referring in this context to English as an Indigenous language), the question of how English can be used to serve his own purposes becomes important: The 'M.C.' after his name means 'My Cousin', affirming the strong family and kinship links in Aboriginal communities, and his track 'B.L.A.C.K.' stands for 'Born Long Ago Creation's Keeper', a reference to 30,000 years of Aboriginal culture in Australia. He does not do hip-hop for its own sake, to advance hip-hop, but rather to

> *advance myself as a human and as an Aboriginal, advance the awareness of my culture, especially on a contemporary tip … right now, I'm international, I'm in another man's land, the nation of Gadagul, I come from the nation of Gombangi. I also try to bring that awareness through hip-hop, there are so many different shades of Aboriginal. One of the biggest personal achievements for me has been going to communities and performing. From somewhere like the Block to somewhere like Noombuwa[6], where it's very different but still the same. Having elder*

> *aunts come up to me and saying 'we like what you're doing, we're listening to what you're saying, and what you're doing is a good thing. We weren't too sure if you were gonna be swearing, but we like you.' So that's one of my big achievements, to be accepted by communities as a positive force.*

For Wire then, the most important form of legitimation is not via a global/ international hip-hop forum but rather through the local/ international contexts where he visits other Aboriginal nations across Australia and is accepted by Aboriginal elders. The same applies to K'Naan, who sees himself as representing the diasporic Somali community around the world, as it does for Te Kupu and the Maori people of Aotearoa/ New Zealand.

Taking self-fashioning seriously

Dusty-foot philosophy, then, can be taken to mean a number of things. K'Naan found himself accused by leading Canadian M.C. K-os of colonialism and pretentiousness for filming the video for 'Soobax' with Kenyan musicians and DJs amongst Somali exiles in Mombassa and Nairobi, in a track called 'B-boy Stance':

> *They took cameras to Africa for pictures to rhyme*
>
> *Over; Oh yes the great pretenders*
>
> *Religious entertainers who want to be life savers*

K'Naan replied to this slur in a track entitled 'Revolutionary Avocado', in the process contrasting not only his own struggles between being promoting peace and needing to fight battles, but also the relationship between Plato and Aristotle:

> *I'm trying to be a peaceful poet*
>
> *But the warrior in me just can't sit back*
>
> *You the all-knowing with a beer bottle*
>
> *Wishing you was Plato and me Aristotle? …*
>
> *Suburban negro turned hip-hop hero*
>
> *Is there a reason he really hates me, though? (McKinnon 2005:1)*

As Darby and Shelby (2005) note, "taking both hip-hop and philosophy seriously furthers our quest for knowledge" (p.xvii). Indeed, they draw connections between some of the North American artists that K'Naan recalls listening to back in Mogadishu, and philosophy as European metaphysical thought: "Rakim and St. Thomas Aquinas school us in the nature of God….Nas and Hegel probe the depths of self-consciousness" (p.xvii).

The idea of dusty-foot philosophy, however, does not by and large refer to this formal disciplinary domain of philosophy. Shusterman's (2005) view of hip-hop as "a whole philosophy of life, an ethos that involves clothes, a style of talk and walk, a political attitude, and often a philosophical posture of asking hard questions and critically challenging established views and values" (p.61) brings us closer to the way of thinking we are trying to open up here. For K'Naan, dusty foot philosophy is a political statement about local knowledge and respect for the dignity of the disenfranchised. Dusty-foot philosophy is juxtaposed not only with Nike-clad mundanity, but also with ways of thinking that overlook the importance of the locus of enunciation (Mignolo, 2000): It is hip-hop that deals with the politics of location and inequality, hip-hop

that is located in traditions and philosophies embedded in long histories. We have argued in the chapter for the importance of taking the local seriously. As David Scott (1999) argues, the “real question before us is whether or not we take the vernacular voices of the popular and their modes of self-fashioning seriously, and if we do, how we think through their implications” (p.215). If indeed we take modes of self-fashioning seriously, and allow competing voices that claim hip-hop as part of their history into the discussion, we are obliged at the very least to account for the constant struggles between identification, rejection, engagement with local cultural forms, and uses of language that not only localize but also transform what it means to be local.

Ultimately, therefore, whether we are dealing with the global spread of English or the global spread of hip-hop, we need to move beyond an image only of spread and adaptation, beyond only a pluralization by localization (global englishes and global hip-hops) in order to incorporate as well the self-fashioning of the already local. If we take Wire’s view seriously that hip-hop has always been Aboriginal, if we view the dusty feet and the abodigital fingers as linked to the histories and traditions of locality in a different way, we are confronted by the need to articulate a new sense of history and location. The global locatedness of hip-hops demand that we rethink time and space, and adopt what Mignolo (2000) refers to as a historiography that “spatializes time and avoids narratives of transition, progress, development, and point of arrivals” (p.205). If we can allow for “multiple, heterogeneous, and uneven temporalities and histories that the dominant historical narrative, often presenting itself as singular and linear, suppresses” (Inoue 2004, p.2), it becomes possible conceptually to question the linearity at the heart of modernist narratives about origins. Global hip-hops do not have one point of origin (whether that be in African griots, New York ghettoes, Parisian suburbs, the Black Atlantic or Indigenous Australia) but rather multiple, co-present, global origins. Similarly, global Englishes are not what they are because English has spread and been adapted but because language users refashion themselves, their languages, their histories and their cultures. Just as hip-hop has always been Aboriginal, so has English. Such an understanding of hip-hop as dusty-foot philosophy, we are suggesting, radically reshapes the ways in which we can understand global and local cultural and linguistic formations.

Endnotes:

1 Interviews and other materials used in this paper are drawn from two Australia Research Council (ARC)-funded projects, Postoccidental Englishes and Rap (Pennycook) and Local Noise: Indigenizing Hip-hop in Australasia (Mitchell and Pennycook(. For other versions of interviews, see also Mitchell (2006).

2 The word *corroboree* is used fairly widely across Indigenous communities in Australia to refer to events or meetings (as opposed to ceremonies) which typically include songs, dances and other social and cultural activities. Like a number of such terms, it is a word that has been appropriated into English and then reappropriated by Aboriginal communities. There is a further reappropriation of the term in Wire MC’s use here.

3 Here and in other parts of this chapter, we are indebted to extensive discussion and negotiation with coeditor Samy Alim in helping us to clarify such arguments so that our goal in taking the local voices of hip hop artists seriously does not start to look like yet another effacement of the key role of African American creativity in global arts (where jazz is another example).

4 Indeed, they elsewhere invoke the arguments of the Senegalese Afrocentric philosopher Cheikh Anta

Diop's that development implies acceptance of new elements: "sans acceptation d'éléments nouveaux, il n' y a pas de développement; nous avons accepte d'éléments nouveaux dans les langues, les instruments, etc et nous avons guardé notre base" (Without accepting new elements, there is no development; we've accepted new elements in languages, instruments etc and we have still kept our base). (Interview)

5 Ocker is an Australian slang term for a (stereo)typical, white Australian male.

6 The comparison here is between the poor and predominantly indigenous inner-city area of Redfern in Sydney, known as the Block, and small rural indigenous communities such as Noombuwa.

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