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Hip Hop and Resistance: a theoretical hypothesis

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Abstract

In the 1970s, as the city of New York is diving into a deep financial crisis, the Bronx is in the middle of a rival gangs' confrontation. However in 1971, South Bronx gangs gather and sign a treaty of truce. Afrikaa Bambaataa, a young Warlord of the Black Spade gang emerges as a peace builder and in 1975 he creates his own organization, the *Zulu Nation*, that brings together the four components of Hip Hop culture (D jing, Mc ing, B boyin, graffiti). He organizes the first *block parties*, which are informal parties where the DJs illegally plug their sound systems on the municipal electric network. Gangs finance and protect the *block parties*, with the agreement and sometimes the benediction of the community. But most of all, the *block parties* catalyze the South Bronx youth and for a moment pacify gangs.

Using the resistance paradigm, and Cornel West' *substantial conception of the cultural democracy*, I will question whether *Hip Hop*, engages and potentially challenges American democracy in creating an autonomous space to put citizenship in practice.

Introduction¹

« *The Revolution will not be televised* »

A few weeks ago, Gil Scott Heron, the God Father of Hip Hop, as most MCs called him, died. Gil Scott Heron is known, amongst other things, for his prophetic song “*The Revolution will not be televised*”, released in 1970. In this poem/song, Scott Heron criticizes mass media and the white unconcerned middle class America that doesn’t see the disintegration of black inner cities. After the Civic Rights Movement years decline, poorest African-American populations faced a period of disillusionment. In the 1970s, the flight of the black middle classes from the ghettos was one of the causes of its closure (Wilson, 1987). In the South Bronx, these years were marked by an unprecedented growth of street gangs. As the journalist Chang noted, “the history of gangs in the Bronx is the dub version of the history of the years 1968 to 1973, the other side of the revolution”(Chang, 2008, 60). In the late 1960s, the heroine made a sudden return in the streets of South Bronx. Gangs took the law into their own hands and started to restore order in the streets. Over time, some residents eventually began to turn over them to defend a popular justice in the streets. Thus, Danny DeJesus, member of the Savage Skulls, told the journalist Jeff Chang: "Before going to the local police, people came find us to solve their problems" (Chang, 2008; 70). While the gang battles intensified, big parties – called Block parties- organized by gangs emerged from some South Bronx neighborhoods. They were the heart of a cultural movement that has continued to grow since then, the Hip Hop culture. The earlier Hip Hop movement is thus linked to the development of gangs and informality. For Tricia Rose (1994), Hip Hop movement is rooted in a struggle for public space and a claim for street presence. It is particularly true for the earlier Hip Hop that emerged from the New York gang culture and its struggle for territorial control. Hip Hop culture is composed by four elements, dj-ing, break dancing, Mc-ing and graffiti. Those four elements share a turf affirmation, related to identity struggle. For example, notes Nielson (2010), break dancers performed with crews or *posses* “*that controlled certain neighborhoods and who, during competitions, would battle (...) until a clear winner emerged*” (Nielson, 2010; 1256). This competition for space also exists in the battle between police and hip hoppers, such as the “war on graffiti” undertaken by New York Police

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department in 1972. As Morant notes, the funk music was “the social protest discourse of the young black poor and working-class community after the euphoria of the civil rights movement faded” (Morant, 2011, 72). Funk, then Hip hop, served as a counter-protest movement, a creative form of communication, using everyday life experience as a base to build a new social critic after the civil right movement. However, notes Horner (Horner and al., 2001), because of a political protest activity drop in the mid 1970s and in the 1980s, social research has underestimated the political scope of the Hip Hop movement and has focused on the previous decade. The studies of the 1970s and 1980s were more focused on gang’s analyses.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the study of gangs has occupied an important place in social science. Frederic Thrasher’s seminal work, *The Gang*, (1927), is often cited as the earliest sociological investigation on urban street gang. In the Chicago school tradition, Thrasher’s work focus on early urbanization, immigration and industrialization to understand the emergence of street-gangs. As Venkatesh and Coughlin (2003) noted, over the end of 1960s, the study of gangs remained strongly attached to the ecological interpretation of cities, particularly in the postwar era (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Miller, 1958, Spergel, 1964). During that period, criminology became predominant and most of the research understood gangs as a social problem. In that perspective, gangs are defined as groups of deviants, products of social disorganization and not racial organization. However, in the course of the 1980s “war on drugs”, researchers started to ask different questions on gangs, such as their entrepreneurial organization and their link with the underground economy (Collins, 1979; Hagedorn, 1988, Sanchez Jancowski, 1991; Venkatesh & Levitt, 2000). In the early 1990s, studies of intersecting forces of economic, social and cultural marginalization as the consequence of a period of deindustrialization, lead to new debates in gangs studies (Wilson, 1987; Hagedorn, 1988, Anderson, 1999, Bourgeois, 2001, Wacquant, 2001). As Venkatesh (2000) points out, the debates around the culture of poverty theory and the neighborhood effects influence gangs research, and some scholars theorize gangs as key socializing milieu producing an habitus, wherein members develop dispositions and reproduce the social conditions cementing their class trajectory (Bourdieu, 1973). In this new frame, racial and ethnic differences among street gangs have become a central issue (Short, 1996; Spergel, 1995) and racialisation one of the major question. With the permanence of the “super-gangs”, scholars focused on the institutionalization of gangs in postindustrial condition. As noted by Hagedorn, in the twilight years of the twentieth century, “*gangs restructured and prioritized economics over politics*” (Hagedorn, 2007; 23. See also Hagerdorn, 1998; Venkatesh & Levitt, 2000). Finally, in the

early 21st century, globalization debates were introduced within gang's studies, redefining the redivision of space, the strengthening of traditional identities and the salience of underground economy (Hagedorn, 2007; Hagerdorn, 1998; Venkatesh & Levitt, 2000).

From another perspective, a major part of the research about Hip Hop is led by ethnomusicologists who focus on the lyrics or on some particular personage of the Hip Hop scene (Kubrin, 2005; Quinn, 2004; Guy, 2004). Some focus on rap as performance and the transformation of black identity (Smitherman, 1997; Dimitriadis, Guy, 2004)), or on the question of race in Hip Hop (Ramsey, 2003; Kelley, 1996; Harrison, 2009). Others analyze the particular production of gangsta rap and the violent and stereotype image conveyed by MC's (Guy, 2004; Quinn, 2004; Kubrin, 2005) or are interested by the production of a special space in hip hop lyrics (Forman, 2000; Hess, 2009). Finally, the political dimension is analyzed by scholars who interrogate lyrics and MC's life (Morant, 2010; Stanford, 2011; Alridge, 2003; Boyd, 2002; Perry, 2004; Henderson, 2007) or the relations between Rap and the State (Nielson, 2010). However, I would like to go ahead in the analyze of the political dimension of the Hip Hop in understanding the Hip Hop not only as a musical expression but as a social movement.

To what extend is it possible to analyze Hip Hop as a radical form of resistance, as the construction of a performative identity and a citizenship in contemporary cities? What are its struggle methods or in the world of Tilly (1986), *repertoire d'action*. I will focus my presentation on the earlier hip hop movement from its emergence in the South Bronx to the dead of Tupac Shakhur. Indeed, the period beginning after 1996 and Tupac's dead is often considered as a turning point, where commercial rap became predominant.

The reflection I will present is based on a 3 months preliminary fieldwork, and shape the theoretical frame of my PhD research on the regulation of informal security in the South Bronx and in Soweto.

In the following communication, I will first present the emergence of Hip Hop movement in the South Bronx, its birth place, and show how it is related to gangs presence and organization. I will then focus on the question of hip hop as resistance, analyzing four dimensions: *hidden transcript*; space struggle; spirituality; black rage.

1. Hip Hop and gangs in late 1970s South Bronx

Hip Hop emerged in a particular site, the South Bronx. In its earlier period, Hip Hop history is related to gangs because it emerged from their typical organization and most of its founders were gang members. This particular story, and place are determinant for the development of hip hop even today.

1.1. A picture of South Bronx in the late 1970s

« *There it is, ladies and gentlemen. The Bronx is burning* » announced Howard Cosell on that warm night of summer 1977. Indeed, an hour before the opening of the game in the Yankees stadium, a fire had started in an abandoned public school a few blocks away from the stadium. Before that night, since 1953 already, the future of the Bronx could be read in its landscape. The South of the Bronx had been cut from its North by the Moses's Express Highway project, that led to the exodus of white middle class families to the North. At the end of the 1960s, white families had flight out the South of the Bronx, leaving a growing poor population of Afro-American, Afro-carribeans and latinos. By the time of the 1970s, the south of the Bronx concentrated street gangs, for the most infamous, the Chagaling and the Savage Nomads on the West, the Black Falcons on the North, the Ghetto brothers, the Turbans, the Mongols or the Seven Immortal on the South and the Black Spades and the Savage Skulls on the East. These 1970s street gangs fight against each others to define and delimitate their territories. The Ghetto Brother gang, counted over one thousand members and was the most powerful gang of the South Bronx. Its leader, Carlos Suarez and its vice-president, Yellow Benjy, were part of the same Puertorican immigrant families. Benjy was also member of the Puertorican socialist party and influenced the gang to have a more political implication. Since the beginning, the ghetto brother had a strong attachment with the Young Lord Party, a Puerto Rican nationalist group developed in Chicago, originally from a gang foundation. They adopted the same political claim and criticized the lack of jobs and the police brutality. In the same way, the Savage skulls were linked to the local Young Lord group and helped them when the group launched a free medical service operation. They also served as securitization forces when the Young Lord took assault on the Public Hospital to deliver free care. As Erie notes, institutional gangs were linked with different radical parties which they support acting as protector, in return of substantial support (Erie, 1988). Especially, the gang in the South

Bronx filled the vacant place of the civil right organization that was not able to recruit the young generation. At the same period, the Black Party and the Young Lord declined. However, gangs benefited from their organizational and highly disciplined structure. By the year of 1971, the violence between East-South Bronx's street gangs was at its climax. In November, the ghetto Brother conveyed all South Bronx gangs' leaders to a meeting near to the Bethesda Fountain of Central Park.

1.2. Bloc Party and Bambaataa. The link between gangs and rap

While the clashes between gangs intensified, the cease-fire of 1971 reconciled Black and Latino gangs of the South Bronx. This peace treaty had a profound impact on the South Bronx, particularly because of the personal involvement of the president of the Black Spades, Bam Bam. Warlord of the Black Spades, the young Afrika Bambaataa is recruited by Bam Bam for his ability to rally the people. In 1975, he launched the Zulu Nation which served as a tool to organize evening parties, the Block Parties, presided over by Bambaataa. Jazzy Jay thus explains to Jeff Chang: "Block parties were the occasion to do our thing by getting connected to the lampposts. Sometimes, we played up until two in the morning. And we had the support of the whole community" (Chang, 2008; 109). Bambaataa was the only person capable of bringing together in the same party gang members of different neighbourhoods. Besides, Bambaataa in Zulu means "affectionate leader". And that is exactly what this visionary incarnated as he put Block parties at the heart of the culture of the South Bronx. This movement is the core of the Hip Hop culture as it converges for pillars of the latter: DJ-ing, MC-ing, Bboying and graffiti. Block parties became henceforth the meeting point for different actors of the Hip Hop scene. Apart from his work, we know little about Afrika Bambaataa. His age today remains unknown, much like many segments of his life. The journalist Chang writes, regarding the legend of Bambaataa, that "the philosopher Claude Lévi-Strauss could have said that he is someone who lives twice simultaneously – once as a historical figure, another, separately, as a myth, beyond temporality" (Chang, 2008; 120). However, Bambaataa's initiatives are not welcomed by all, and some gangs continue to seek conflict. The authorities abandoned long ago vast areas of the Bronx and the organizers of these informal parties have not to worry about illegally connecting their sound desks to municipal wires. The Block parties played the role of catalyst for the youths in the South Bronx and soon these "block parties" spread in all the Bronx.

Thus, hip hop emerged from gangs organizational practice and actions as a tool for the pacification of the South Bronx era. Block Parties served as a catalyst movement of the youth in the neighborhood. However, even if Hip Hop earlier period is embedded in gangs history, Hip Hop represents a counter-proposition of its violence. In this particular setting and in this ambiguity, hip hop is constructed as a resistance discourse.

2. Hip Hop and resistance: a theoretical view

To what extent is it possible to conceptualize and understand the hip hop culture as a form of resistance? The *Resistance theory* is postulated by many scholars but it is anchored in various references and definitions. The concept of resistance became prominent in the 1960-1970s gang studies (Downes, 1966; Young, 1971; Hall & Jefferson, 1975; Willis, 1977). For Matza (1964), youth gangs resist to adult morality systems. In the 1980s however, it lost its theoretical strength to be replaced by the social reproduction theory. Recently, Hagedorn (2008) has borrowed the notion of *resistance identity* from Manuel Castells and demonstrated that the socially excluded produce religious, ethnic or racial identities in order to protect their personality and their community. They, therefore, suggest a new interpretation of Hip Hop and Rap cultures. Thereby, rap must be understood as a culture of rebellion. By tracing back the history of the emergence of the Hip Hop movement – from its birth in the Bronx to its stratification – Hagedorn shows that the *gangsta culture* is an expression of the dispossessed, a manner of making sense and creating an identity of opposition. What's more, the Zulu Nation experience must be understood as an attempt to empower the excluded.

In the last two decades, Anthropologists have developed interesting ways to conceptualize the resistance paradigm that has become a fashionable topic. Attention has shifted from issues of social control and social structure to issues of agency and resistance. Although this rapid proliferation in different disciplines, scholars, have noted Hollander and Einwohner (2004), use the term resistance to describe a wide variety of actions and behaviors at all levels of social life and the term resistance still lacks an adequate definition.

Anthropologist M. Brown argues that attention to resistance has increased as revolutionary dreams have lost their pregnancy in social science. Resistance paradigm finds its roots in Foucault's analyses of circulating power (1978) where Foucault drew attention to less organized, un-institutional and more pervasive forms of resistance. His work finds an echo in

Scott's work on "everyday form of resistance" (1985), for whom « *class resistance includes any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis these superordinate classes* » (Scott, 1985 ; 290).

Recent works such as Bayat *Life as Politics* (2010) discuss this notion of everyday practice of resistance in the urban context. Bayat emphasizes the everyday resistance's idea of Scott and uses Foucault's decentered notion of power to analyse micropolitics and the resistance perspective. In Bayat perspective, the analysis of conventional social movements (protests, political party activism, etc.) doesn't take into account the political participation of the marginal. Researchers have to look closely, decentralize their own levels of analysis and look at the micropolitics activity. Bayat uses the notion of social non-movement, which describes the collective action of actors who are not collectively organized, but that through common day-to-day practices define practices of resistance. These practices are not guided by an ideology or even a leader or an organization. These actions are often quiet, almost soundless. Above all, actors put into direct practice their claims. Hence, "there is not a politics of protest, but a practice of redress through direct and disparate actions" (Bayat, 2010; 13). It consists of *ordinary practices of everyday life*. And it is through the daily (co-)presence of marginalized actors that resistance arises. As follows, Bayat underscores that the *art of presence* is the crucial moment of non-movements. Bayat writes: "the story of non-movements is the story of agency in the times of constraints" (2010; 20).

In this theoretical perspective, I would like to point out several dimensions of hip hop culture that can be characterized as practices of resistance. Indeed, I would like to look closely to Scott's notion of *hidden transcript* in relation to rap lyrics; then underline the practice of hip hop as a practice where the space is at stake; then, I will investigate the question of the new spirituality in the earlier Hip Hop, with the example of the Zulu Nation and the ALKQN; Finally, I will follow Cornell West in analyzing how Hip Hop represents the expression of *black rage* and questioning the continuity with the 1960's black power movement.

2.1. Hip hop and hidden transcript

One of the propositions is to analyse Hip Hop practice and lyrics as a hidden transcript in the way Scott conceptualized it. In his work, *Domination and the Art of Resistance* :

Hidden Transcripts, J. Scott (2008) elaborates what he calls *hidden transcripts* and *public transcripts* of dominated populations. Scott theorizes the nature of communication across lines of power and explains how power relation affect what people say to different social audience. In what interests us here, the hidden transcript *consists of comments, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict or inflect, off-scene, what transpires in the public transcript*. It consists indeed of the discourse of the dominated in the backstage, hidden from the dominants' sight and control. The hidden transcript of the subordinate is an emotionally fueled response to the practice domination. Scott asserts that the content of the hidden transcript emerges from the redirection of masked rage, from the "*frustration of reciprocal action*". In its proper social site, noted Gal (1995), the hidden transcript provides the means to express these emotions and make them collective. Scott notes that no matter the degree of sophistication of the hidden transcript, there will always be a substitute of an act of affirmation directly undertaken in the face of power.

In our case, this hidden transcript is the one of the South Bronx population elaborated in the South Bronx during the 1980s. Hip Hop emerged through two different practices. The first one, bloc parties, will be analysed later. The second, mixtape, emerged as a musical force in the late 1960s with the technology that allowed Djs to spin records into original mixtures and record them to cassette. In fact, noted Ball (2008), the mixtape was "hip-hop's original mass medium in the days prior to its acceptance as pop culture" (623). Mixtape directly recalls the tradition of underground communication employed within African America (Gall, 2008). Ball notes that such communication has been the foundation of extra-institutional education societies as the American Negro Academy, the Harlem History Club, and so on. Mixtape makes possible to affect a large segment of the hip-hop market, in the south Bronx. During the 1980s and 1990s, before the large merchandisation of Hip Hop, mixtapes were sold in the street corner by Djs themselves, or in the back of the record store. The notion of self-production is crucial to the early hip hop cultural movement, and its origins is also "*organic and indigenous to the community in which such culture found its subsistence, with the idea of self-sufficiency and self-production*" (Maher, 2005). Mixtapes also recalls the informal origins of hip hop. Thus, rap in the first years was less visible than today, allowing the MC Nas to call it a "ghetto secret". It is only in 1979, with the release of "Rapper's Delight" hit that raps began slowly to grow and moved to a confines ghetto secret into "the public sphere of world wide cultural discourse" (Dimitriadis, 1996; 179).

Moreover, rap lyrics consolidate the theory of hip hop as hidden transcript. Nielson (2010) notices that intentional misspelling is typical in rap lyrics. He suggests that rappers

intentionally disregard the spelling used by the dominant culture and thus challenge the “socio-cultural and linguistic hegemony” (Olivo, 2001; 70). “*Nowhere*, note Nielson, *is this more apparent than in Black music, whose lyrics have often included lexical items whose meanings are not meant to be discernible to a mainstream audience*” (Nielson, 2010; 1261). The semantic inversion, what MCs call *flippin the script*, are intended to preserve a hidden form of communication among blacks, that would be “linguistically unintelligible to the oppressor (Smitherman, 1997; 17) and can be understood as an *antilanguage* in the face of the public transcript. Respelling then is an encrypt practice among African American MC’s. Smitherman notes that Hip Hop is embodied in the communicative practices of the larger Black speech community and uses the African American language (AAL). AAL is a production of free African slaves that have evolved since 17th century alongside to the English American language (EAL), including linguistic pattern from Niger-Congo languages. The result, explains Smitherman, is a “*communication system that functioned as both a resistance language and a linguistic bond of cultural and racial solidarity*” (Smitherman, 1997; 8). Several grammatical and phonological forms differentiate AAL from EAL, such as the use of aspectual *be* that indicate iterativity, continuity and ongoing process². The *flippin the script* practice is also an AAL form. The term *nigger*, *nigga* or *niggaz* is symbolic of this AAL use and crucial in rap lyrics. When used by AAL speakers, the term *nigger* has a different meaning because of the use of postvocalic –r deletion rule in the AAL. In fact, in AAL, the term *nigger*, or *nigga_* and its plural form *niggaz_* in rap lyrics, has several meanings. In one hand, the positive meaning of *nigga* relates to best friends, or homey. Black woman use it to refer to their boyfriend. On the other hand, the negative meaning of *nigger* refers much more to negative social behavior than to the racial association in the EAL. However, the racial association is used to demarcate black from white and represents a reaffirmation of cultural pride and life in the hood such in the N.W.A’s 1991 song NIGGAZ 4 LIFE. As Smitherman demonstrates, the communicative practices of rap are rooted in the African American speech community. In this way, Chuck D, member of Public Enemy, summed up that “Rap is Black folks CNN” and that it represents the African American popular tells (quoted by Fernando, 2000; 303).

² Smitherman use the example of the sentence « *The brotha be looking good* » which means that the quality quality of « looking good » referring to his attractive appearance, is not limited to the present moment but reflect his past, present and futures.

2.2. Hip Hop and space struggle

As I said earlier, Hip Hop culture, and rap particularly, began as a situated cultural practice and emerged in a typical spatial context, bloc parties. Here, the turf is a stake and hip hop constitutes a protective space where the hidden discourse can be expressed outside of the dominant overview. Indeed, hip hop space has to be protected.

Organized by Djs and gang, block parties served as place to have fun as well as marking a particular territory. In fact, hip hop movement is rooted in the struggle for public space and the claim of streets, as Bayat's concept of street politics explain (Nielson, 2009; Bayat, 2010). The notion of *street politics* that he uses refers to the conflicts that are played out in the streets between individuals or groups and the authorities. Indeed, the conflict is generated when citizens actively take over the streets when only passive use of them is allowed. Therefore, according to Bayat, street vendors that unintentionally extend their activities onto the sidewalk, park squatters, youths that control street corners or even women who sell homemade food on the streets, all together question the State and its prerogatives by actively appropriating themselves of the public space in their daily activities. On the other hand, the struggle for the control of public spaces makes way for the development of collective identities and solidarities. What is more, writes Bayat, this street politics "signify a crucial symbolic utterance, one that goes beyond the physicality of streets to convey collective sentiments of a nation or a community. Political streets, then, denotes the collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices that are expressed broadly in public spaces" (Bayat, 2010; 12).

Nielson notes that this space claiming was "*obvious in the fierce territoriality of the New York gang culture from which hip hop sprang, and it soon came to characterize hip hop performances as well*" (Nielson, 2009; 1256) which were "*traditionally staged within geographical boundaries that demarcate turf and territory*" (Forman, 2000; 68). Earlier breakdancers, for example, performed in crews that controlled certain neighborhoods. Moreover, the *Cypher* in which the dancer exerts and competes is the symbolization of a territory that have to be taken. Often, two crews battle around this circle, performing individually for the cause of the crew, until one of them wins the place. Graffiti artists practice directly this street politics, by tagging side of train or walls to show a belonging, as an *art of presence* (Bayat, 2010).

In the emergence period of rap, Djs had spatial distribution of sound systems and crews in New York. As Grandmaster Flash, one of the first Djs of the South Bronx scene, explains:

"We had territories. It was like, Kool Herc had the west side. Bam had Bronx River. Dj Breakout had way uptown pas Gun Hill." (quoted by Forman, 2000; 66). Those territories were recognized by all the participants of Block parties and protected by gangs. Some scholars identify a transition from gang-oriented affiliations to music and break dance affiliations that maintained the important structuring systems of territorialities (Hager, 1984; Toop, 1984). This alternative geography was based and established among Dj's, depending of their gangs belonging and their authority among the territory. But moreover, these places must be understood as "lived places and localized sites of significance" (Forman, 2000; 67) and are not immovable. Together, notes Forman, "*these overlapping practices and methods of constructed place-based identities, and of inscribing and enunciating individual and collective presence, created the bonds upon which affiliations were forged within specific social geographies*" (Forman, 2000; 67). In fact, Rap gave to the city an audible presence (Forman, 2000). Those practices find roots in the traditional geographical boundaries created by gangs to protect turf and territories. As Tricia Rose wrote, rappers emphasis on *posses*, crew and neighborhood has "*brought the ghetto back into the public consciousness*" (quoted by Forman, 2000; 71). The *posse* is a fundamental social unit creating a collective identity rooted in place. The term *posse* is related to Jamaican gang culture that adapted a gangster imagery of movies into its own cultural systems (Gunst, 1995). The Jamaican *posse* expansion and its venue in New York, coincides with the emergence of rap in South Bronx. Many rappers claimed their posse belonging as well as a specific hood identity. But, the territory is also the place were MC's first test their ability, trained their skills and gain local reputation. In his work on gangs, Hagedorn (2008) uses the concept of *Defensive space* to describe places where gangs and hip hop evolve, protected from the oppression. What Scott pins down as a *social site* is a protected physical space where hidden transcripts may emerge. It is necessarily an area that cannot be reached by the controlling hands of those who dominate. Hence, the production of hidden transcripts depends on the creation of physical places, and free time left relatively unguarded.

In its earlier days, Rap was an ephemeral lived performance. As Scott explains: "*Oral traditions, due simply to their means of transmission, offer a kind of seclusion, control, and even anonymity* (Scott, 1990; 160). Tricia Rose (1994) argued that hip hop culture shows the importance of the postindustrial city as the central urban influence and that the particularities of urban space are subjected to the deconstructive and reconstructive practice of rap artists. In fact, the New York sound systems alternative geography stresses the strategies uses by Mcs, graffers or Breakdancers that gives rise to radical transformation of the city.

Finally, those space of protection, where Hip hop emerged and evolved, are also symbolic and imaginary spaces, as symbolized by the terms of Hip Hop nation.

2.3. Hip Hop and Spirituality

As a child, Afrikaa Bambaataa went to see the movie *ZULU*, released in 1964, that told the story of the siege of Rorke's Drift in Natal (South Africa) in 1879, where the British army was assaulted by the armed forces of the Zulu kingdom. What the young Bambaataa sees in this movie, are the images of Black solidarity (Chang, 2008). Upon this image of solidarity comes the idea of the Zulu Nation. The *Zulu* factions rapidly multiplied in all the South Bronx, taking little by little the place of the Black Spades, but spreading over larger territories. To be Zulu was to have power and respect in the streets, but also the promise of participating in *Block parties*. However, though the legacy of the gangs remained – at least in its symbolic style, Bambaataa hurried to push the organization in the direction of his new catchphrase: “Peace, Unity, Love and Having Fun”. Instead of a set of beliefs, the Universal Zulu Nation promulgated the *Seven Infinity Lessons*, which could be considered as the basic founding principles for its members. The Infinity Lessons cut across a *vagabond eclecticism*, blending a little of familiarity with a lot of esotericism. Thus, they not only brushed against both the origins of the Universal Zulu Nation and their South African ancestors, but also offered a Bronx River tagged version of the origins of Hip Hop. They took up the dietary laws of Elijah Muhamad and the racial interpretations of the Bible by Dr. Malachi Z. York. Presented in the same question/answer teaching method and the lexicon by keyword used by the Nation of Islam and the Nation of Gods and Earths – better known as the Five Percenters, they subscribed to the movements of the 1960's and call for a particular, yet selective, political memory. The Infinity Lessons borrow from the Black Muslims the reminiscence of an original and glorious African past, but not their elicitation of racial separation. They stand strongly on the language of the Nation of Islam, but reject their dogma and orthodoxy. They take on the call of the Black Panthers to a self-defense, but leave aside the programmatic demands for jobs and housing. At a time when the influence of the Black Panthers was floundering, the Universal Zulu Nation does not seek to be a political movement. As Elijah Muhammad preached, the Zulus had to learn to know themselves, understand who they were. Bambaataa takes on the *Block parties* and transforms them into a ceremony consecrated to the new faith. As a new mystique, it is adopted by an army of B-boys, graffitists and emcees that

will go further than Bambaataa by creating by a new culture, but above all a new way of being part of society. Bambaataa addressed the Zulu Krewes as he did political ideologies and his own discs. He took what he had to take and threw out the rest. He created new myths. It is this collective memory – revised at will, reused and even rewritten – that is at hand; a complex alignment of political ideologies, a right to a self-defense, dietary precepts, and above all, a desire for empowerment.

In his work, Barrios (2010) describes how Latinos and Latinas make use of spirituality of liberation to deconstruct, construct and reconstruct their collective identity. In his study of the street gang's Almighty Latin King/Queen Nation (ALKQN) in New York, he shows that the spirituality of liberation serves both as a way to preserve a particular collective identity and to resist forces of oppression. He notes that spirituality of liberation functions "*as a force raising consciousness, organizing and then mobilizing people to fight and change those injustices that (Latinos and Latinas) are facing*" (Barrios, 2010; 227). In Barrios approach, spirituality is a *repertoire d'action* (Tilly, 1986), a resistance strategie, and must be politicized.

2.4. Prophets of the hood and black rage : from Malcom X to NGWA's, Public Enemy and Tupac Shakur

*I don't claim to be a preacher
Not paid to be a teacher
But I'm grown
I try to be a leader to the bone...
then I sing a song
About what the Hell is goin' wrong
« Rebirth », Public Enemy*

In this section, I suggest to understand gangsta rap violent lyrics, with its themes such as drug, toughness, firearms, sexual violence or respect, as the expression of the contemporary black rage.

Cornel West, in his famous book's *Race Matters*, wrote that « *Malcom X articulated black rage (...). His style of communicating this rage bespoke a boiling urgency and an audacious sincerity*» (West, 1993; 135). In West words, Malcom X is the *prophet of black rage*, as he crystallized the relation of black affirmation of self, desire of freedom, and rage against

American society. Boyd (2002) argues that there is a great divide between the civil rights generation and the hip hop generation and that Hip hop “*has rejected and now replaced the pious, sanctimonious nature of civil rights as the defining moment of Blackness*” (Boyd, 2002; xxi). In Boyd’s definition of hip hop as a subculture among contemporary black youth, rap is a method of delivering messages to the hip hop community. Hip hop is a “new way of seeing the world and it is a collective movement that has dethroned civil rights and now command our undivided attention” (Boyd, 2002; 13). Since the early 1990s, rap music has undergone major transformations, with the emergence of “gangsta rap”: while still popular, it became highly commercialized around 1999. Its roots can thus be framed from early depiction of hustlers lifestyle and blaxploitation movies of the 1970s, with the glorification of black as criminal, pimps and gangsters. For Keyes (2002), gangsta rap is a product of gang culture and street war of South Central and Compton, Los Angeles. Krims (2000; 70) argues that since its early pioneers were gang members, gangsta rap relates to the life experiences of the rappers themselves, and its lyrics portray gang and ghetto life from a criminal’s perspective. For Kubrin (2005), the *Street code*, revealed by Anderson (1999) exists not only in the street, but also in rap music. Rap music is thus a depiction, a report, of street life. The outlaw personification in gangsta rap is what West calls the “*marginalist tradition of reponse to the conditions of African American life*” (Quoted by Perry, 2004; 103). This Afro-American tradition promotes a self-image of confinement and revolt. In this hip hop depiction, the outlaw is a heroic figure. Gangsta rap *style* is most exemplified by the Californian group N.W.A (Niggaz With Attitude) and their hit “Gangsta Gangsta” or “Fuck the Police”. This new generation of rappers –called by Boyd the *Reagonomic rappers* (Boyd, 1997)- has been influenced by the harsh social and economic consequences of Reagan presidency. Consequently Nihilism and self-hatred have become endemic to gangsta rap (Guy, 2004). In *Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes colonial mimicry of the colonizer by the colonized as a challenge of the conception of the colonizer’s superiority. Perry suggests that the gangsta lyrics product a “thug mimicry” as it turn into black American stereotypes. Unlike Bhabha mimicry, thus, *thug mimicry* dislocates the authority for defining black negative images. Gangsta rap may not offer a “positive” representations of its own constituency, but at least those constituents have taken some control over that representation. Perry notes that rappers “*might mirror the stereotype of the black assailant or criminal effectively and subvert not in terms of critiquing the stereotype itself, but in terms of giving a voice to the stereotypical figure*” (Perry, 2004; 109). In that way, like Malcom X exprimed in his black rage, the

resistance against white racism, gangsta rap, in their violent lyrics, confronts white supremacy.

In his affirmation of a black leadership crisis, West compares black leadership from the civil rights period and today black politicians, and argues that there is a lack of authentic anger and an absence of genuine humility in the last group. On the contrary for Boyd, rappers are the new H.N.I.C. (*Head Niggas in Charge*). Indeed, the earlier hip hop express the voice of a generation, such as in *The message*, where in 1982 Grandmaster Flash sings : “ *Broken glass everywhere/ people pissing on the stairs/ you know they just don’t care/ I can’t take the smell/ I can’t take the noise no more/ Got no money to move out/ I guess I got no choice*”. The New York based group Public Enemy follows this lead with his video *fight the power* or the album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us back*. The gangsta rapper Tupac Shakur, son of Afeni Shakur, a member of the Black Panther Party, is also perceived as a socially conscious artist. However, his character rested on the “*divide in his mind and soul between his revolutionary pedigree and thug persona*” (Dyson, 2001; 14). Closed to the New Afrikan People’s Organization (NAPO) and the New Afrikan Panther, Tupac’s songs acknowledge the subordination of African people and the sacrifices of Black political prisoner. Tupac embodies the link between the Black Power movement and hip hop culture, with his families influences and histories and his own activist practices. Tupac’ example suggests continuity between the civil right period and the hip hop generation. As Harding (1981) argues, many of the concepts and ideas of the Civil Right Movement continue to resonate within the hip hop community. However, Tupac also developed an ideology called “*Thug Ideology*”, shaped on his own experiences of living in a ghetto, with a drug addicted mother and no father, and rooted in gangs personae. But, Tupac believed that *thug* could have a political role, and he helped to formulate a “*Code of Thug Life*”. The *Code* acknowledged that gang life encompassed violence and criminal activity, but it was designed to politicize gang members. In 1992, two Los Angeles main black gangs, the Crips and the Bloods, joined to sign the *Code of Thug Life*. Ub 1995, Tupac founded the *Outwaz* (Operating Under Thug Law as Warriors) rap group to give an audible presence to his political activism. His death 1996 is considered by some scholars (Guy, 2004 ; Quinn, 2004) as the death of gangsta rap period.

Conclusion: Returning to resistance or « *Resisting to Resistance* »

“The revolution will be lived”: new forms of citizenship

Three decades after Gil Scott Heron poem about the inner cities situation, the Chicago based rapper Common, sings “*the revolution will not be televised; the revolution is here*” in the introduction of his “*The 6th Sense*” song. Doing so, Common recalls Heron ending sentence, “*the revolution will be lived*” and shows us what Hip Hop has brought since the 1970’s in matter of political struggle. Registering the revolution in the present, Common accords Hip Hop a particular political resistance force.

In this conclusion, I would like to push a little further this theoretical frame and ask if this Hip Hop resistance lead to the development of a new form of citizenship. In his analysis of rap music, Shusterman (1991) identifies the *Sampling* process as one of rap’s most significant formal innovations. In this process, rappers take one sound from a record and re-inject it in another one, making a new record. There is no more a single artist, interpret of a song, but a multiplicity of artists, from various periods and styles. As Baker suggests (1986) about the blues, the result is that “*what emerges is not a filled subject, but an anonymous voice issuing from black (w)hole*” (quoted by Nielson, 1263). This typical Hip Hop process echoes with West argument about jazz as a mode of being in the world. West uses the term “jazz” as an “improvisational mode of protean, fluid, and flexible dispositions toward reality suspicious of “either/or” viewpoints, dogmatic pronouncements, or supremacist ideologies” (West, 1993; 150). The jazz soloist explains West, “*is promoted in order to sustain and increase the creative tension with the group – a tension that yields higher levels of performance to achieve the aim of the collective project*” (West, 1993 ; 150). According to Cornell West, Black Americans had no other venue than respond to racial terror through a “substantial conception of democracy” (West, 2009), which implied not only the protection of rights and liberties, but also and especially the promotion of self-respect and dignity in the private and the public spheres. Opposed to the “masquerade” democracy, Afro-Americans built up a “substantial form of cultural democracy” that is not reductive to a form of government but rather a cultural way of being. West thus reminds his readers that the Black folk *is* the Jazz folk pursuing a personal voice, a form of unique self-expression (the peculiar pitch of Davis’ trumpet, the southing sound of Coltrane’s saxophone, or the gnarled bounce of Mingus’ bass line), in the context of cooperation with others, “where each occupies a specific place, which means that

one must be able to bounce back and give each other the courage to get involved ever further in the collective performance”. Yet, according to West, this performance does not only imply a form of distraction for it is also a medium through which racialized individuals or individuals subject to racial pressure can exert power and pride, conserve their dignity and fight for self-respect. “This means, West writes, that jazz is a mode of democratic symbolic action, just as blues is a mode of deep, tear-soaked individuality. It has nothing to do with American bourgeois individualism [...]. Even so, deep down, the individualism which I speak of refers to a mode of existential democracy”. Hip hop lyrics often refer to the cipher, a conceptual space in which consciousness is the priority. The cipher is a privileged outlaw space but it is also the place to be free and to perform a particular belonging and citizenship. It is the liberating potential of the daily practices of empowerment as well as in the Infinity lessons of the Zulu Nation that one finds another way of being a citizen, for a kind of democracy different than the current one. J.-A. Boudreau (2010) takes note that the notion of citizenship has evolved considerably, incorporating in the past years substantive dimensions. Citizenship, explains the author, is built upon conflict and negotiation. Likewise, for Isin (2008, cited in Boudreau, 2010) the act of citizenship is a relational act that can be acted out as a claim. The notion of citizenship is thus dynamic, allowing one to think the “act of being present” (Bayat, 2010; Boudreau, 2010) as an act of citizenship. Accordingly, Boudreau notes that the “modern notion of citizenship channels the political conflict and attributes actor-legitimacy to precise individuals and practices that exclude the illicit and the informal” (Boudreau, 2010; 34). It seems therefore necessary to re-conceptualize this notion of citizenship and of thought in action. According to Holston (1995), cities are the locus for the emergence of a new citizenship. This “urban citizenship” is not opposed to the classic and national citizenship; it is rather juxtaposed. It is accessible to non-national actors as long as they are residents of the cities in question. These *urban citizens*, therefore, exercise a substantive citizenship contrary to the formal, reserved to the nationals. Spaces of contention, in the periphery, in the cities, are created in conflict with a worn-out citizenship. However, above all, this urban citizenship is heterogeneous: “Its insurgent citizenship opposes the modernist and developmentalist political projects of absorbing citizenship into a plan of nation-building monopolized by the state” (Holston, 1995, 328). It is not defined by a homogenous culture that would constitute a formal national identity, but acts upon its heterogeneity and the materiality of the urban experience.

“Resisting on resistance”

Resistance has become a central, if not a dominant, theme in social studies. As Brown noted, attention to this theme has increased with the loss of 1970s’ revolutionary dreams. Recalling for Geertz commitment to “thickness”, Ortner calls to pay attention in the way researcher use the concept of resistance. As she discusses the concept, she introduces nuances and underlines that there is never a single, unitary, and simple sense of resistance. The post-colonial studies notion of ambivalence (Bhabha, 1985; Hanks, 1986) has to be (re)explored. Ortner wonders if the category itself is really helpful to “understand a variety of transformative process, in which things do get changed, regardless of the intentions of the actors or of the presence of very mixed intentions” (Ortner, 1995; 175). Indeed, process of “everyday form of collaboration” (White, 1986) has to be studied with, sometimes along, the resistance acts. In fact, individual as well as large movements are often conflicted, internally contradictory or ambivalent and the internal politics as well as the presence of power is much more complex and can not be reduced to binary conceptualization. The absence of this analysis in resistance studies gives them an air of romanticism. Moreover, for Ortner, *“resistors are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a virtually mechanical re-action. They have their own politics”* (Ortner, 1995; 176-177). Sometimes, subjects even reject the notion of resistance that doesn’t make sense in their *own politics*. Comaroffs describes *“the endogenous historicity of local worlds”* (1992; 27), in which the pieces of reality, however much borrowed from or imposed by others, are woven together through the logic of a group’s own locally and historically evolved bricolage. (quoted by Ortner, 1995; 176). The notion of “everyday form of resistance” is in itself challenging, because the question of what is or is not resistance become much more complicated. Bayat underlines that resistance writers tend to confuse an *awareness* about oppression with *acts* of resistance and he returns to Scott’s work emphasizing that resistance is an intentional act.

However, as Foucault argues (1890), power circulates. Then power and counter-power are not in binary opposition, but in a decoupled, complex, ambivalent, and perpetual “dance of control” (Bayat, 2010; 46).

The question of authenticity is another problem that resistance researchers undermine. In ignoring internal conflict, they postulate both an homogenous community and a community constructed in cultural purity. But, as Ortner noted, *“an understanding of political authenticity, of the people’s own forms of inequality and asymmetry, is not only not*

incompatible with an understanding of resistance but is in fact indispensable to such an understanding” (Ortner, 1995; 186). For example, the term *underground* is claimed in the Hip Hop scene by artists as an index of street authenticity. But, as Harrison notes, by the mid- to late- 1990s, an independent movement “*specifically referred to as underground hip hop began emerging as an alternative to rap music’s mainstream appeal*” (Harrison; 2009; 4). In fact Hip Hop is crossed by binary oppositions such as “staying true to yourself and the community” versus “following mass and commercial”. Aside from these stylistic differences, by refusing to conform to commercial rap’s dominant (black) iconography, early African American underground artists proposed alternative forms of hip hop blackness (Harrison, 2009). Mc’s embodies both penetrations of the dominant culture and limitations on those penetrations. The result is a much more complex picture. Finally, argues Ortner, agency is not an entity that exists apart from cultural construction. “*Every culture and subculture constructs its own forms of agency (...) One must explore the particularities of all these constructions, as both cultural and historical products*” (Ortner, 1995; 186).

Finally, to my own perspective, anthropology help to go further in this debate, as ethnography means the “*attempt to understand another life world using the self (...) as the instrument of knowing*” (Ortner, 1995; 173). With its inclination to deeply study the live of its subject, ethnography has the possibility to challenge pre-oriented conception and ideology. As Ortner write: “*the inclination of ethnographic subjects to “push back” against such theory-driven myopia should serve as a reminder that the central goal of disciplined ethnography is to let our interlocutors show us their social world in way that make sense to them.* (Ortner, 1995; 189). As ethnography attempts to understand another life by using its own word and putting the searcher as a tool of knowing, the theoretical perspective presented here needs to be challenged by the fieldwork.

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